

Ales Adamovich
Daniil Granin

A BOOK OF THE BLOCKADE



Raduga Publishers Moscow

This book tells about the nine hundred day siege of Leningrad during the Second World War. Its two authors—the Byelorussian Ales Adamovich and Daniil Granin of Leningrad, accumulated a wealth of material: diaries, letters, poems written during the blockade, and survivors' reminiscences. They interviewed "the strong and the weak, those who had been saved and those who had saved others". To quote Granin, "Each new story we heard and recorded seemed to be the summit of suffering and grief, but then another would reveal new depths of sorrow and endurance, would show us the human spirit in its awe-inspiring strength and dimensions."



INSIDE COVER: The notice on the wall reads:
"Citizens, during artillery bombardment this side of the street is the most dangerous."

ГРАЖДАНЕ!
И АРТОБСТРЕЛЕ
А СТОРОНА УЛИЦЫ
БЕЗПАСНА.

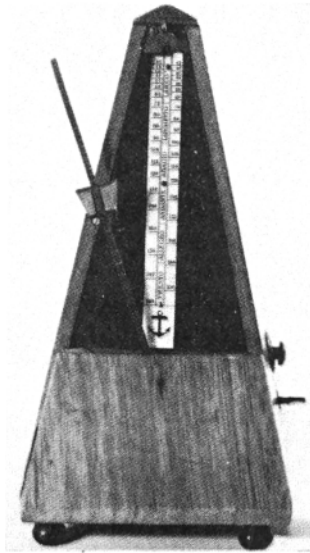


Ales Adamovich
Danil Granin

A BOOK OF THE BLOCKADE

SILENCE DESCENDED ON LENINGRAD
BROKEN BY METRONOME BEATS...

OLGA BERGHOLTZ
"FEBRUARY DIARY"
January-February 1942.



The metronome sounded in the besieged city day in,
day out; its beat was like a pulsating heart,
quickening during air raids and shellfire,
and reassuring—the beat of life itself—during
the intervals of quiet.



Apart from what we could find in our private archives, we used materials from the State Film and Photo Archives, the State Museum of the History of Leningrad, photographs by B. Kudoyarov, V. Tarasevich, E. Kapustin, N. Lavrentyev, D. Mukhin, V. Tobolsky and pictures from family archives of Leningraders.

INSIDE COVER: The notice on the wall reads:
"Citizens, during artillery bombardment this side of the street is the most dangerous."

Ales Adamovich
Daniil Granin

A BOOK OF THE BLOCKADE



Raduga Publishers
Moscow

Translated from the Russian by *Hilda Perham*
Designed by *D. Mukhin, N. Lavrentyev, V. Medvedev* and
E. Kapustin

А. Адамович, Д. Гранин

БЛОКАДНАЯ КНИГА

На английском языке

REQUEST TO READERS

Raduga Publishers would be glad to have your opinion of this book, its translation and design and any suggestions you may have for future publications.

Please send all your comments to 17, Zubovsky Boulevard, Moscow, USSR.

ИБ № 37

Редактор русского текста Р. Шубина
Контрольный редактор Е. Ольшевская
Художественный редактор П. Караченцев
Технический редактор Е. Фонченко

Сдано в набор 23.02.83. Подписано в печать 22.07.83. Формат 60х90/16. Бумага мелованная. Гарнитура Столетие. Печать офсетная. Условн. печ. л. 31,0. Уч.-изд. л. 41,65. Тираж 7660 экз. Заказ № 252. Цена 6 р. 20 к. Изд. № 33.

Издательство "Радуга" Государственного комитета СССР по делам издательств, полиграфии и книжной торговли. Москва, 119021, Зубовский бульвар, 17.

Отпечатано на Можайском полиграфкомбинате Союзполиграфпрома при Государственном комитете СССР по делам издательств, полиграфии и книжной торговли. Можайск, 143200, ул. Мира, 93.

© Издательство „Советский писатель”, 1982

English translation © Raduga Publishers 1983. Illustrated

Printed in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

CONTENTS

Part One

“ONLY WE OURSELVES KNOW...”	7
SOMETHING UNKNOWN ABOUT A WELL-KNOWN PHOTOGRAPH	16
DOUBTING VOICES	23
INFILTRATED INTO THE CITY	34
THE HIRED ASSASSIN	45
LIFE UNDER THE BLOCKADE	72
AT WORK	86
WHAT COULD BE DONE	109
FROM ONE DAY TO THE NEXT	134
EVERYONE HAD A SAVIOUR	148
WHAT KEPT PEOPLE ALIVE?	164
LENINGRAD CHILDREN	171
THERE ARE TWO MORE YEARS AHEAD	204
THAT IMMORTAL, ETERNAL MARIA IVANOVNA	214

Part Two

THREE OUT OF THREE MILLION	219
“I SHALL NEVER LEAVE THE CITY”	240
THE FIRST ROUND OF CHILDREN'S EVACUATION	246
GEORGI KNYAZEV'S SMALL RADIUS	255
OF THOSE WHO WERE NEARBY	259
“I'M SIXTEEN	264
WHAT THE STOICS TAUGHT	267
THE FIRST BOMBING	271
DIARIES, DIARIES...	284

THE HUNDREDTH DAY OF THE WAR	296
CHILDHOOD ENDED	303
THE BORDERLINE!	313
SOMEONE ALWAYS MAKES NOTES	321
THE FROZEN SPHINXES	325
HUNGER IS NO FRIEND, YOUR CONSCIENCE NOT YOUR NEIGHBOUR	329
HUMAN LIMITS	336
IRA'S RATION CARD	350
SAVING THE CHILDREN	359
WHAT SUPPORTED THE SPIRIT	374
THE RING NARROWS	386
THE LAST PAGES	401
REMAINING A HUMAN BEING	417
A HISTORIAN'S DUTY	432
"I'M FEVERISHLY HURRYING TO LIVE"	438
900,000 LEAVE	447
"...WHY DID YOU TAKE OFF YOUR CAP?"	455
THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE UNRIGHTEOUS	461
THE WEIGHT OF BOOKS	464
"YOU WILL NOT SET MY LAND ATREMBLE..."	477
LIFE MUST GO ON	483

PART ONE

"ONLY WE OURSELVES KNOW..."

This true story has its addresses, its telephone numbers, its first names and surnames. It is to be found in Leningrad flats, with their many door-bells—all you have to do is to press the bell opposite the surname in your notebook. Your visit, your sudden interest may or may not be expected. The person you have come to see may be a man or a woman but will definitely be elderly and doubtless troubled and wondering ("Who is it? Why? What's it for?"). Whoever it is will invite you in, and will almost inevitably say: "So many years have gone by... It's all fading from my memory."

Old Leningrad houses, homes of those who lived through the blockade.

The people we have visited are like soldiers who now live a life of peace but are still surrounded by the same things, the same walls, as if still in the same dug-out, the same trench. There are traces of shell fragments on the old-fashioned moulded ceiling, scratches from glass splinters in the piano lacquer. A burn mark from the *burzhuika** on the gleaming parquet... "The parquet flooring's damaged here—that's where, towards the end, my husband chopped up the furniture. Until he died on this sofa. Here..." (*Alexandra Den*).

"This is the view we had from this window... The race-course. Slightly to the left, if you look out of any window, there's the Obukhovsky Hospital, and to the right the gasworks. And in this direction we could see the Badayevsky Stores..." (*Nina Penkina*).

"We saw in New Year 1942 here in this room, which was already absolutely frozen. Just here we had our *burzhuika*. The flue diverted the fumes to this ventilator. You see that yellow stain? We can't get rid of it anyhow, because this is where the *burzhuika* stood..." (*Lydia Usova*).

She still has the blackout curtains which concealed the light of her wick lamps from enemy planes. She says—not believing it herself, yet she says it

* *Burzhuika*—a small makeshift iron stove.—Tr.



The door of the yard-keeper's lodge in Knyazev's house.

the same: "If I throw them out, war will begin! "

Maya Babich remembers as she shows us her flat:

"Just my mother and I remained here during the blockade. Some of her women friends gathered here in this flat and also the neighbours from upstairs. And here, in one room, which was well back in the block, and was the furthest from the street, we huddled together. The windows were broken, and we covered one of them with this carpet here, a handmade Turkish carpet. Later we propped a mattress against one of the windows... Shell fragments came through the windows and lodged in the walls..." Here the Leningraders were under fire, here death rained down upon them— shells and bombs. Here the enemy tried to kill them by starvation, here they lost many relatives, friends and neighbours, and also their health. And now they live (in the very same apartments) like everyone else. Just like everyone, only surrounded by memories...

Those memories live deep inside them—memories of the blockade and all they went through, all they endured with millions of Leningraders who are no longer alive. They must remember for the dead, too, and if anyone asks, must tell what they remember.

"So many years have gone by... It's all fading from my memory."

But nothing is forgotten. This phrase, born here, in Leningrad, resounds like a certainty, a hope, a request. No, nothing's forgotten—how could anyone forget what had happened, even if they wanted to, even if they had the right to forget? The blockade survivors remember it all. They held out through the blockade, lived through it day by day with incredible human dignity. But do we, who did not live through it, or today's youth, have the right not to try to find out about all that Leningraders endured, lived through, suffered and achieved for our sake?

Today we visit a particular survivor to record his memories, for time bears off with increasing speed the witnesses, the participants, those who were in Leningrad at that time, who saw it all and knew it all...

We found there was much we did not know of the cruel truth behind the familiar words "the Leningrad blockade". Even we who went through the war—one with the Byelorussian partisans, the other on the Leningrad Front—and had, it seemed, become accustomed to anything, were not prepared for what we heard. Those people had spared us over the years, but as they related their stories they did not spare themselves.

It is easier to understand and accept the merciless facts of the "Leningrad memory" if you see these people, the narrators themselves, and do not simply hear their voices on tape or read their reminiscences.

There is much about these people that is surprising and unexpected. But it all turns out to be so simple, so understandable and so human—and all the more astonishing.

For example, it is amazing and infinitely moving to discover how many of the blockade survivors have been—and still are—writing poetry. Not just diaries and reminiscences, but poetry as well. About one in ten of them. (For example, during the blockade, in 1943, a woman wrote letters in verse to her niece, a Leningrader who had been evacuated, and received replies also written in verse...) Why? Is it the influence of the city itself, with its incomparable poetic culture? Or are the minds of Leningraders

too deeply imprinted with the memory of how it was—hunger, blockade and poetry (about their sufferings), and all these side by side? They heard poetry, heard it on the radio, listened more avidly than ever before in their lives to the verse of Olga Bergholtz (and others, too).

One might not attach any special importance to the “unprofessional” enthusiasm of those adults for writing verse if it were not possible to see something more behind it, the essential thing: over the years much about the blockade is seen in a poetic light, the spirit of the general heroism colours everything. But the point is not that the Leningrader leaves out of his recollections the cold, the hunger and the horror of putrefying corpses piled in the courtyards. That is all a living cry of anguish in his heart, to this day. But in everyone, and more important than anything else, is the realisation that these were historic days and nights, that Leningrad was a unique city, the only one to withstand so long a blockade, that its example helped the world and mankind to pull up short on the brink of an appalling abyss. The isolated, beleaguered city was strong because it was not alone, because it was the focus of the attention, love and faith of the whole country, of the country’s very tangible and never-failing support. The incredible sacrifices and ordeals we learned of from survivors were lightened by a sense of gratitude and pride, by the inspiring feeling that Leningrad had stood firm! We had stood firm! Life went on!

*...So it began,
with blood-encrusted ice,
the year of 1942, in war's grim vice.
That year of mounting strength and indignation!
We rose to fight—
fight to the bitter end.
The year of Leningrad,
its winter violent,
the year of Stalingrad's
great confrontation.
It swept off life's routine.
Then, boldly,
to claim its sovereign rights came life supreme.*

(Olga Bergholtz)

How much suffering people had to endure, how much grief they had to live through, women’s sorrow, frustrated hopes and expectations (“When, when will it end at last?”) for them to have this poetic vision of the lifting of the blockade, to preserve that vision and their feelings for 30 years and say: “We were demobbed and from January 9, 1944, I was working on the trams—they were running along Nevsky Prospekt. And then came the first day when the blockade was lifted. Our naval ships started firing their guns. What a spectacle—I shall never forget it! Beautiful and awe-inspiring. As if all the water from the Neva was rising, fiery-red, rising above our heads, and there was great thundering...” (Anna Petrova, Block 1, 74 Basseinaya St.).

Extensive documentary literature exists about the Leningrad blockade, the heroic defenders of the Neva stronghold, and that "mercenary" of the fascists—blockade starvation.

Many hearts and minds throughout the world were shocked by the winter diary of little Tanya Savicheva: "Grandmother died on January 25... Uncle Alyosha, May 10... At 7:30 a.m, May 13 Mummy died... Everybody is dead. Only Tanya is left."

In the invaluable detailed diaries of the writer Pavel Luknitsky *Leningrad Keeps Going* and in the published notes and diaries of other eyewitnesses and participants in the heroic epic of Leningrad there is much undying truth which is vital to people.

The past few years have seen the publication, especially in Leningrad, of reminiscences of people who took part in the city's heroic defence and the lifting of the blockade—generals and privates of the Leningrad Front. We have had the reminiscences of full-time workers for the party and the local Soviets who succeeded in organising the life of the besieged city, maintaining the people's morale and setting up The Road of Life across the Ladoga Lake. There have been reminiscences of young defenders of the city—schoolchildren, sea cadets, those who during the blockade organised vegetable supplies, prepared peat and firewood... Books about scientists, actors and musicians, painters, doctors and teachers who were in the blockade.

A host of feature articles, stories and novels have been written, from Nikolai Chukovsky's *Baltic Sky*, Vera Ketlinskaya's *Under Siege*, books by Olga Bergholtz, Nikolai Tikhonov, Vera Inber, Vsevolod Vishnevsky and Alexander Fadeyev... All of them portrayed with honesty, passion and talent, what they, the authors, and their characters had seen and experienced. Alexander Chukovsky's novel *Blockade*, a work of many volumes, incorporated documents and true stories conveying the courage of the great city and, most important of all, the way the history of the siege was interwoven with the whole history of the Great Patriotic War.

What more can be conveyed to people, to the world, about all this? And has today's world any need of it?

We wanted to supplement the story of the Leningrad blockade with the testimony of ordinary people about how they lived, to record the living voices of participants, their stories about themselves, their families and their comrades. The voices of the ordinary Leningraders, working or not working, married or unmarried, foremen, workers, children, qualified engineers, nurses—but it's not a matter of trades and occupations. We had to limit ourselves, because it was not possible to cover all sides of life in this big city, to show all spheres of it. We were interested in what people had gone through. We wanted to take in, to understand and preserve all that people had experienced, what they had felt, what had gone on in their hearts, and we did not want to speak of people in general but of specific people with names and addresses, the old and the young, the strong and the weak, those who had been saved and those who had saved others... In those conditions, it turned out, a person's daily round and his very life merged into one—a bucket of water, a wick lamp, and a bread queue—all required incredible effort, and everything was a

problem for the weak and the exhausted.

Where did they find the strength to do it all, what was the source of their steadfastness, their strength of spirit?

We began to be confronted with no less agonising problems of a moral character. Other yardsticks emerged for assessing kindness, heroism, cruelty and love. Relations between husband and wife, mother and child, between relatives, friends and fellow workers were all tested to the utmost.

People's stories presented those complex moral problems each one had to solve. We encountered extraordinary examples of strength of spirit, nobility, moral fineness and devotion to duty, but there was also unheard-of suffering, agonising deprivation and death...

It had not always been clear to us whether the time had come for these stories of such cruel starkness. But on the other hand, would not the moment and the opportunity be missed for speaking of all this exactly as it had been in real life, as it is remembered only by Leningraders?

In those days beset by frosts, shelling and hunger-induced hallucinations, the familiar voice of Olga Bergholtz came over the radio, speaking to, and on behalf of, Leningraders.

"Only we ourselves know how we all deserve a respite." "Leningrad spared her (the motherland), for a long time we said nothing about the pain we were enduring, concealing our exhaustion from her, understating our agony..." "They besieged Leningrad for 900 days, subjecting it to tortures of which we still cannot speak..."

These are excerpts from her 1942, 1943 and 1945 broadcasts.

Leningraders bore the blockade from day to day with tragic fortitude and dignity. With the same dignity they have held back for years, keeping to themselves the searing truth of their experiences.

Now we had come to them, to those very men and women, in order to "record everything", for "the time had come". "People want to know everything", "they must know about it..."

As we went to see people with our tape-recorder, touching on the raw their hearts still aching with losses and suffering, we often wondered whether we should be doing it, whether we had the right to. The stories of the Leningraders themselves were the answer. Through them comes the message—in text and intonation: yes, it's hard for us, it's painful for us to remember, but it would be still more painful to think that no one needed all this except ourselves.

But really, if all this did happen on our planet—the deadly blockade hunger, the countless deaths, the torments of mothers and children—if people had to go through all this, then the memory of it must be open to others for decades and centuries to come.

Back in 1944, on the day the blockade was lifted, when a start was made to transform the exhibition of the defence of Leningrad into the Defence Museum, the authentic, searing story of the 900 days' heroism began to be told. One of the museum's founders, *Vasily Kovalyov*, remembers all the exhibits by heart and speaks of them as if conducting a visitor from hall to hall: here is the air force hall, with the plane that first bombed Berlin in 1941, this is the artillery hall, with the mortar of the

Shumov brothers, here are several halls devoted to the partisan movement...

There too, was Tanya Savicheva's diary, which, having been carefully preserved, is now displayed at the centre of the memorial in the Piskarevsky Cemetery. These notes made by a little girl who died in 1945 in evacuation have become one of the most formidable indictments of fascism, a symbol of the blockade. The diary has its own history.

"It was brought in by Lev Rakov, the museum's director," Kovalyov says. "This little book made an incredible impression. The ceiling of the hall in which it was exhibited was designed to give the impression of a tent. There were columns representing ice, and at the entrance to the hall was a showcase which looked as if it had been iced over. In it stood scales on which lay 125 grammes of bread, and opposite was another showcase with a collection of documents concerning Leningraders' rations. The ration shrank and shrank until the 125 gramme mark was reached for bread, but later on, with the opening of the Road of Life across the Ladoga Lake, it began to grow again. In the centre of the hall was a showcase from the old museum of Leningrad. On one side lay Tanya Savicheva's diary, written in blue pencil, and on the other were decorations awarded to people who died in the blockade, and among them the papers of a young man. Before that hall was one devoted to the snipers.

"I remember Lady Churchill standing before the case containing Tanya Savicheva's diary. When the contents were translated to her, her eyes filled with tears. Eisenhower also stood there—he came with Zhukov. Budyonny stood there for a long time, and so did Kalinin (incidentally, the house he once lived in was right opposite the museum, in Solyanoi Lane)..."

Our work involved the collection of thousands of pages of diaries and notes kept by people who lived through the blockade and thousands of pages transcribed from tapes, and we had to decide what to do with it all. What were we to select from it, and how was it to be arranged? Without effort on our part the material would simply be buried—who would ever read it?

Yet, all the while we realised that it was the blockade survivors who were to be the main authors. They told the story, we wrote it down. They handed over to us their diaries, their recorded reminiscences. Now all this became part of the pain and the wealth of our own memories, too.

The reader, of course, wants to hear from, is interested above all in, those who themselves lived through the blockade, who were history itself. We realised this, and after all, what can anyone add in the face of their truth and their ordeal? We saw our role as authors in giving the blockade survivors the opportunity to meet one another in the pages of this book about the blockade. Those hundreds of people, so different one from the other, had shared the same fate in beleaguered Leningrad. They had shared so many thoughts and feelings, so many unfading images and pictures in their minds—each of them reaches out to the next, voice echoes voice, pain and tears respond to pain and tears, pride in having borne it all to pride... Which of these should we select, which should we omit? There are facts that are clearly unbearable, legendary stories which cannot be checked... We left out hundreds of the pages we worked so hard to

find, record and decipher if those pages did not stand comparison with other pages, stories and experiences. We had to retain the most significant and the most commonplace. We wanted to preserve the individuality and roughness of a narrative, of the individual "voice", to the detriment of any literary considerations. There has already been literature on the subject, and good literature, at that. There will be more. There is a time and place for everything. Literature has its own advantages and possibilities, but it has its limitations, too, in the face of such events and sufferings. Let the memory of the Leningrad blockade speak out for itself on these pages, in its own language and style, and we ask you to accept the awkwardness and inconsistency of the living narrative. Even more, we ask you to forgive us for certain corrections and cuts, for our intrusions and commentaries, for involuntary breaks in the threads of individual and family lives...

People did not only starve, they did not only die, did not only overcome suffering—they kept going. They worked, they helped in the fighting, they saved people from death, they served others: some supplied fellow Leningraders with fuel, some took care of children, organised hospitals and clinics, some kept the factories and plants going. In fact it was there in every story—hunger, cold, bombardment, deprivation, death and the psychological problems arising from these sufferings; at the same time there was people's activity, their behaviour, what they accomplished, how they fought, despite everything. These three sides of life showed through in every story. They were inseparable—to dismember an integral narrative would be difficult, for each story was not about some particular event. During the blockade people went on living, and consequently they talked about life as a whole, in which the prewar years, the family, and the postwar period were inextricably entwined; there was the front, evacuation, and present-day life. From this integral exposition, steeped in feeling and mood, we had to take a single episode, sometimes only a phrase, a thought—that is, to divide the indivisible. We had to rule out the front from the stories, although the city was inseparable from the Leningrad Front. It hurt to leave out the fighters of the Leningrad Front, soldiers who bore the burden of hunger and had not the strength to break the blockade and free the city, yet did not let the nazis into it, denied them the chance to transfer troops from around Leningrad to other fronts. True, the enemy held the city in the grip of the blockade, but the small, hungry army of the Leningrad Front pinned down the fascist armies in bitter combat at the walls of Leningrad. One after another—by the blows of the Sinyavino operation and on Moskovskaya Dubrovka—the plans of the Germans to take the city of Lenin were foiled. We could not encompass everything: this part of the book has its own theme.

The book of the blockade consists of the notes and narratives of several hundred people. We could not mention the names of all those from whom we took notes, could not use all the material collected. Nevertheless, in one way or another they are all in this book. We began with experiences, perhaps the most sacred of them, to which the memories of the narrators (every one of them) turned with caution, with pain and trepidation, yet did so inevitably and constantly. Those memories were of hunger, shelling, bombing, the first autumn, the first winter of the blockade—1941-42



Veronika Opakhova with her two daughters, Lora and Dolores.

—and spring 1942. This is where we have to begin. For a start we must show the full extent of the deprivation, the bereavements, the agony Leningraders went through, for only then can the heights and the strength of their heroism be appreciated.

SOMETHING UNKNOWN ABOUT A WELL-KNOWN PHOTOGRAPH

One spring day in 1942 two women were walking along the street with a little girl of about five. She was trying to play as she went, hopping now and again...

At that moment a war correspondent took a photograph of them somewhere near Nevsky Prospekt.

Later we saw this photograph in the Leningrad Museum, in the museum at the Piskarevsky Cemetery, and in books and albums about the blockade. It has been published time and again in magazines on anniversaries, along with pictures of trolleybuses buried beneath snow and sledges carrying the dead...

As you look more closely at the picture, it becomes clear that the first woman is older than the other. The second is still a child, just a girl, but her face and figure are those of an old woman. And the little girl hopping along beside them has legs, thin as matchsticks, with ugly bulges at the knees.

We studied this photograph again as we sat in the flat of *Veronika Opakhova*. Before long her daughter Lora came in, a small woman like her mother, just as welcoming yet more restrained, with unfading sadness in her eyes.

Before us on the table was the Opakhov's family album. Here in this flat that blockade photograph, known throughout the world, is a family memento...

In no way could those women sitting there before our eyes be reconciled with their images on that photograph, they bore no relation to them.

Blockade survivors are here, there and everywhere among the Leningrad crowds.

No doubt many people have seen this woman, Veronika Opakhova, when they have gone to the Academic Choir Concert Hall in Moika Street. An elderly woman with a very homely, kindly face, she checks the tickets and offers programmes, with an air of thanking you personally for coming. Perhaps there is a special reason—because you, unknowingly, have come to listen, among others, to her daughter Lora, who sings in the choir. They live there in Moika Street, a stone's throw from their place of work.

Sitting in their small flat, we studied that photograph for a long time. It was the starting point of a story—at first the mother's, then the daughter's.

“You have never seen people collapsing from hunger. You did not see them dying. You did not see the mounds of bodies that lay in our wash-

houses, in our cellars, in our courtyards. You did not see the starving children, and I had three of them. The eldest, Lora, was 13, and she lay in a state of starvation paralysis, with terrible dystrophy. As you can see from the photo, she wasn't a 13-year-old girl but more like an old woman."

"That's Lora on the left, is it?"

"Yes... I was 34 when my husband was killed at the front. Then, when the children and I were evacuated to Siberia later on, people there thought two sisters had arrived—she looked so terrible, old and altogether awful. And her legs? They weren't legs, but bones wrapped round with skin. Sometimes even now I look at my own legs. Below the knees some kind of greenish-brown blotches appear. They're under the skin, evidently the remains of some scurvy-like disease. Scurvy was rife among us, for you can understand yourself: we had only 125 grammes of bread per day in December—and even that wasn't bread at all. If you could have seen that piece of bread! In the museum it's already dried up and lies there like something that's been specially made. But in those days when you took it in your hand water oozed from it and it was like clay. Imagine bread like that for children! True, my children weren't in the habit of asking for things, but you could see it in their eyes. You should have seen those eyes! It's impossible to convey that to anyone... The Gostiny Dvor department store was burning for more than a week, and there was nothing to put out the fire, as the mains were broken. There was no water, no able-bodied people, no hands to help. People just didn't have the strength. But all the same people struggled from one end of the city to the other, they tried to do something, they worked. I didn't work because when I wanted to they wouldn't take me since I had a young child. They tried to get me out of Leningrad at the earliest opportunity—they saw more terrible times ahead. They did not know then that everything would go so well, that there would be a breakthrough, that our troops would go into action and that everything would go very well. We were evacuated in July 1942."

"And your third child, the youngest?"

"Yes. As you see, she's trying to hop, although she had knees like that. They were badly swollen, full of water. She was four. What can you expect? She was warmed by the sun, she was walking along with her mother, and her mother promised that they'd go for a walk, then come home, go to the canteen, use their ration card to get a dinner each, go home again and eat it. And that word 'eat' was a magic one in those times. At home she would often sit on a chair holding a purse, and tear off bits of paper—she was doing that all the time—while waiting for dinner. Like all the children in those times she had a swollen, dropsical stomach. Later on, when we finished eating, she'd sit on her chair again, pick up those pieces of paper and start tearing them up again, filling up her purse."

"As if she thought they were ration cards?"

"Yes, she used to tear up the bits of paper as if they were bread coupons. She'd be busy destroying little bits of paper. Now she's a grown woman, with two children of her own."

"What's her name?"

"Dolores. She was born in 1937. My husband was a military man, and at the time we lived in a military compound. About that time a great many of our people came back from Spain. My husband liked that Spanish name, and gave it to our daughter."

"Where was your husband killed?"

"It was in 1942, during a crossing of Lake Ladoga. He was a man with a peaceful profession. He was a musician, and in civilian life had been conductor of an amateur orchestra. Then he joined the army and became a military band leader. And he was a medical man too. He had some medical training. Our third daughter's called Berta. She's also alive. All my children are alive, all three of them."

"Did you have dependants' ration cards?"

"Yes, we did because I didn't work. Initially I was in a sanitary team in our block. But when the doctor found out that I had three children they let me off, though I started going to medical courses, well, first aid courses. A person would fall in the street, with shrapnel wounds, and you had to get him into a building, to the first aid post, and put dressings on. Every Leningrader was doing that then."

"Where did you live?"

"We were living in Grazhdanskaya Street, in Oktyabrsky district, at No. 19. Now we're at flat 17 No. 20 Moika Street. My daughter's been singing here in the Academic Choir for 20 years."

"And you?"

"I've been working there, at the Academic Choir Concert Hall, since 1968, as a ticket-collector. In Grazhdanskaya Street we had a 20-square-metre room, and such a big family. Now they've given my daughter this flat."

"And here in this photo—where were you going?"

"As far as I remember, that was Nevsky Prospekt. The route we took after we left home was along Maiorov Prospekt, then Herzen Street, after which we turned this way, towards the department store. I took them out to take their minds off food. We were simply out for a walk. Lora was only just picking up. The doctor said she had to practise walking—she was quite paralysed on the left side. You can see—she's walking with a stick. The doctor said she must walk as much as possible. So we used to do very long circular walks. Sometimes we even dropped in to the cinema, we'd watch the films to take our minds off food."

"The cinemas were open?"

"Yes, they were already open. Once at the Molodyozhny we were watching 'They Met in Moscow' and the air raid warning went. They stopped the film, the lights went out and we sat there for a while. In winter, of course, things were more difficult, because, you realise, there was no water, the mains were broken. So people went with kettles, saucepans, with sledges, the best way they could. And you could get water through those hatches (there were open hatches where you could get fresh water). Then in our block they got the water turned on in the wash-house and we'd file in there holding hands—there were heaps of bodies waiting to be taken away. They'd pick up the bodies in the streets, and store them in the wash-house (later lorries would come to carry them away). And that's

where we got water, in that same wash-house. So we used to go in there hand in hand. Those who were scared kept their heads turned away from that part of the wash-house.

"So you went hand in hand because you were afraid?"

"Both because we were afraid, and because there was no light. The first in the line would carry an old-time country-style splinter light, and so would the last one, while all the others would follow on, some holding kettles, some pitchers. After all, people had to wash, they had to drink, and they had to cook."

"Did you cooperate with one another?"

"People on the same staircase, or on the same landing would go at the same time. If I could take one of the children I'd give him a kettle or a pitcher so we could go together."

"Let's get back to the photo. You were walking along Maiorov Prospekt, and after that?"

"After that we went along Herzen Street towards Nevsky Prospekt, and there by the Barrikada Cinema, we turned into Nevsky Prospekt. A lot of little shops were open there, selling stationery and books."

"That was in February or March 1942?"

"More likely April or May, not long before we left. They evacuated us in July (I've even got the evacuation paper somewhere). The military registration office had asked me to come to see them as the wife of a military man, because in May I stopped receiving my wife's allowance. Then I started getting a small allowance from the military registration office for the children, for there were the three of them."

"Do you remember that day?" we asked Lora. "Do you recall walking there with your mother and little sister?"

"No."

"And other walks of that kind, do you remember those? How old were you then?"

"It seemed to me then that my mother and I were the same age. But I wasn't yet 13."

"Do you remember being ill and hungry? What are your memories as a 12- and 13-year-old?"

"The most terrible thing, to my mind, is when a person feels hungry all the time and there is nothing at all to eat. And the second thing is when your arms and your legs won't function and you don't know whether you're going to live and function at all. The doctor used to come every day and look at me, and I realised that she was only checking whether I was alive or dead."

"Didn't she give you any help?"

"How could the doctor help me? She prescribed the liquid left over after they'd pressed the oilseed, which our children's hospitals got, 'oil-cake milk'. But it was hardly edible of course. She had two patients like me, that is, myself and another girl."

"Was it paralysis due to starvation?"

"Paralysis arising from dystrophy. One day she came and said that the girl had died."

"She told you that?"



"No, she told my mother, but I've got good hearing, and I heard her say it through the door to the corridor. It seemed that the same thing was bound to happen to me. When she came next day and found me still alive, she was even surprised. Later on I met that doctor. It was after the war, probably in 1953. We were walking along—I already had a small child. 'How are you getting on?' the doctor asked my mother. 'How's your family, your husband? Lora died, of course?' 'Doctor,' I said. 'I'm alive, I even have a child in my arms.' She was stunned, didn't know what to say. The fact was that it was a miracle above all miracles."

"How did you come to be saved? It was your mother who did it?"

"My mother, of course, and my father, while he was still alive. And I so much wanted to live. You can't have the faintest idea how much! I'm even surprised that a child of my age could have such willpower. I dearly wanted to live."

"And how were things with your younger sister—do you remember?"

"How could I forget! She was in an awful state. All she did was sit cutting up paper. It even gave her callouses on her hands. It was a mental condition she was suffering from, of course. She was so little, only four. She was hungry all the time, you understand. A hungry child asks for food. But she didn't ask, because she understood that it couldn't be got. She sat there cutting and tearing paper, there was even the possibility that she could go crazy over it all."

"She kept cutting so much that it gave her callouses?"

"Yes, she had them on her fingers. When mother took the scissors away from her she'd find another piece of paper and quietly begin tearing it up."

Afterwards we came across similar things in stories about other starving children of the blockade. Small boys and girls would tear or cut up paper, sitting there swaying from side to side, incessantly hacking away at something in the attempt to stifle the gnawing, crazing sense of hunger.

"Lora became ill in December?" we asked her mother.

"Yes, in December. It was the first time she had been to the baker's on her own. She stood in the queue, then came home and said that her leg felt weak and heavy. So she lay down, and it didn't seem anything out of the ordinary. Then she came with me to saw some wood, because the doctor had said that warmth was the most important and essential thing after food. When we went out to do the sawing, she collapsed altogether. I had to carry her upstairs, and she lay there from December to May. I couldn't give you exact dates, of course, but at the beginning of May she started getting up. The doctor that kept calling told us that it was absolutely vital for us to go out more so that we would get stronger, because there was a period in December and January when we all lay in our beds since by then we had neither the strength to fight nor the wish to get up or to do anything. The door to the flat was left wide open, and anyone who wanted came in. The doctor once came, but I just lay there, and all of us kept lying there, for we no longer had by then reacted to anything. The doctor shouted at me furiously, saying that I must

move about the apartment. How she lambasted me! But she was a very good doctor, really. She came to us every day, although she had no hope that we'd survive. Towards the end of that time she said to me: 'What can I do? Only sign death certificates.' Someone used to come to see me from the Housing Office to check whether Lora was still alive. That was because at that time when people died those who survived used their ration cards. And they were always amazed to find her lying there but still alive... At times she felt a desire to do something, to do a bit of reading, to sew a little with one hand, to somehow adapt herself to her situation. And then later on (I've spoken of that time) when spring came, and the sun warmed things up, we went for walks. The doctor told me: walk, walk, walk, strengthen your legs. Our legs were very painful, after lying so long, and after scurvy."

"You mentioned that your neighbours didn't recognise Lora?"

"That's right. We went out, and I thought I wouldn't get very far with Lora. I decided we'd sit for a bit in the sun, warm ourselves and then go back, for after all, I still had to get her back to the third floor. Even if she weighed practically nothing, at that time I weighed only 42 kilograms. You'll understand that means just a bag of bones. It was hard for me to get her up. And the neighbours said, thank goodness, you've managed to survive the winter because your elder daughter died and you shared her ration cards. At that Lora started crying and said: 'Mummy, let's get away from here. We won't listen to these old women.' They didn't believe she was still alive. They didn't recognise her... We started going for walks. To begin with, not very long ones, but then longer and longer. It was on one of those walks that I ran into that photographer."

"When was the first time you saw the photo?"

"It was in the Defence Museum. Well, it wasn't even I who saw it—I was at the home of my friend, a very old friend. She, too, spent a long time in Leningrad with her children and was also evacuated that summer. Her son had been to the museum. The boys you know, flocked there. It had planes that had been brought down, German helmets, weapons and so on. He ran home and said: 'Auntie Ronya! I saw you!' 'Where did you see me?' I asked. 'I've been to the museum,' he said, 'and there you were, you, Lora and Dolya, all three. And it says underneath: Leningraders out walking.' When my middle daughter came down from the North to stay with me she went to the museum and asked if we could have a print of the photograph. As she left soon, Lora had to go to the museum for it. When she arrived and asked for it, and then saw it, she felt ill. Imagine seeing yourself in such a state! And remembering all that! Living for even a brief moment through all that fear and horror again! A man came over to her, some kind of museum employee, and asked: 'Why are you crying? That winter of 1941 and 1942 a great number of people died. Don't cry. They're dead, and you have to live!' The woman who had handed Lora the photo said: 'You see, it's herself!' He was horribly embarrassed and went off apologising. That's how we got that photograph. I keep it with me. Despite everything I think let it be, even though it's terrible, and frightening, and it's always disturbing and brings one to tears."

DOUBTING VOICES

That's what stands behind one photograph. To an unknown military photographer it meant hope, an awakening to life. To us who are living today it is a distant view of that terrible and legendary reality of the blockade. To the Opakhovs, mother and daughter, it is a living pain in the memory.*

*And you, my friend, in times of peace again,
as life's high noonday, later will remember
the house in Avenue of the Red Commanders,
the dying fire, the draught through shattered panes.
You'll straighten up again, as now, so youthful,
rejoicing, weeping will your heart recall
the darkness, and my voice, the winter ruthless,
the barricades round factory gate and wall.***

These hopes seemed like poetic imagery, like a dream rather than a prophecy. But thirty-five years later it turned out that Olga Bergholtz was right. The terrible hungry years are recalled with horror, grief and tears, "rejoicing, weeping", and deep down inside one is amazed at the spiritual fortitude and remarkable heroism of Leningraders.

Only poetry has that gift of prophecy. In empty, frozen, dark apartments, after the dull ticking of the metronome people heard a woman's quiet voice, with a very slight stutter, the voice Leningraders were waiting for.

Through the hallucinations of hunger compassion and love broke through to people. These came from a woman who was undergoing the same agonies, was also starving, who understood everything, felt everything herself.

And now, after a whole lifetime we were going to these people and asking them to tell us about the blockade. Not about the blockade in general, about which so much has already been written, but about their own lives during the blockade. They all began their answers with: "It's too painful, just impossible. I don't want to remember, no, no, it was all too terrible..."

They were ready to talk of others, of separate episodes—how a factory had worked, or how people dug trenches or put up anti-tank obstacles. But not about their own lives. And that was precisely what we were asking for, to hear about themselves, their own experiences.

Finally they agreed, except for two or three people maybe. Perhaps some of them did not tell us everything. Sometimes they spared our feelings. Sometimes they feared for themselves. Immersing themselves in the past was agonising. As they talked they wept, and at times fell silent, un-

* Three months after these notes had been made, Lora Opakhova died. Even when the blockade is no more, it claims "its own".

** Olga Bergholtz, *February Diary* in *Let the Living Remember*, Progress Publishers, 1975, p. 57.

able to keep themselves under control. After such stories some of them could not calm down for quite a time... Many people rang us within a few days of our talk with them, or came to see us, or wrote, having recalled more and more, or, on the contrary, become horrified at what had poured forth, asking us to wipe their story off the tape.

They were afraid of returning to the blockaded city, to their frozen apartments in which a man "froze in his own bed as if in the steppe" (Olga Bergholtz). We insisted cruelly at times, which was distressing to ourselves, and even shameful. We asked them, citing from history, to do it for succeeding generations, who must know about everything as it really was. Secretly we were tortured by doubts—was it worth it? Why, after decades, retrieve from oblivion unthinkable anguish and humiliating human suffering? Would this really be of use to anybody?

Having told us about her experience of hunger, of the military hospital where she had worked, and evacuation, Galina Eckman-Kriman concluded by saying: "I wouldn't like to return to that. We mustn't forget it, and I never shall, but all the same I don't want to remember it."

As they look back today, people do not themselves believe the things they proved capable of. It was an extraordinary heroic surge of human capabilities: in fact at the most appalling time life itself was in a state of heroic upsurge. People do not want to recall that time, but when they do, it occurs to them that despite everything this was a time when every person proved capable of achievement, of displaying nobility, of revealing generosity of heart, courage, love and faith.

Everyone had a story to relate. Each had his or her own. Repetition was inevitable, nevertheless, each story had its own originality, was quite unlike any other.

We listened, recorded and over and over again felt that here was the limit of suffering, of sorrow, then the next story opened up to us new horizons of grief, fresh summits of fortitude, fresh powers of the human spirit.

We never felt we had an over-saturation of material, we never reached the anticipated point when subsequent stories could add nothing of substance to what we already knew. Perhaps that limit is somewhere ahead, beyond another thirty or maybe fifty accounts, or perhaps there is not one at all, no such saturation point exists.

When on April 5, 1975, we taped our first interview while visiting *Maria Stepanchuk* (8 Shelgunov St.) we already knew about the most painful thing in her memory—the death of her daughter. But she would shy away from the subject. And we could not bring ourselves to insist. Then later it turned out that this had caused her even more suffering. This blockade memory is a complex feeling!

"Do you know what happened after you left?" we were asked on the phone by the woman who had given us *Maria Stepanchuk's* address. "She came running to me, upset that she hadn't told you the main thing. 'I was afraid I'd start crying,' she said, 'if I spoke about my daughter, and that I wouldn't be able to go on, and people had come all the way for nothing.'"

Then, agitated, she went round all her friends and acquaintances from the blockade years (of 27, our informant told us, there were only four of

them still alive). She went to her daughter's grave, and to church. She became ill and took to her bed.

Apparently it was not simply because she was disturbed by her reminiscences. It was also due to some feeling of guilt in relation to her daughter, of whom she had told us nothing—it was just as though she had sacrificed her memory simply in order “not to interfere” with our work—the collection of stories of the blockade.

Then Galina Goretskaya (an acquaintance of ours) showed her a book published in Leningrad, *When the Air Raid Warning Goes*, in which there is a description of the bout of shelling that had been fatal for her daughter, and of the explosion at the factory (the girl was in a nursery nearby). In some bizarre way this had affected the woman, not so much calming her, but nevertheless removing the tension of the past few days. She had seen the book and been convinced that even without her story people would know, would remember!

Also in the memories of those who went through the blockade are arguments, or rather the continuation of arguments (everyday, probably) with those who not only “do not remember”, but are angry when people remind them of the blockade. This is the way things are with children in the family sometimes. The parents keep shielding them from life's dramas (other people's) and troubles (other people's)—as the result, these over-protected children grow to be callous and unfeeling.

“They keep on and on asking me about the blockade. But what was the blockade in fact? Last year my granddaughter wrote, and now she says it: you have no proof.”

This outburst came from *Taisia Meshchankina* towards the end of her story. She had more than once tried, at home among her children and grandchildren, to tell them some of the details about the blockade, and they hadn't believed her. How could she prove it?

“I'm telling you about my experiences in the blockade and all the time I'm thinking—perhaps you won't believe me either?”

At every step we were constantly coming up against this painful expectation of disbelief, this feeling of caution that cropped up in the course of reminiscences; as people listened to themselves, they became wary, tended to dry up, substituted well-known facts for their personal stories.

“A woman I know teaches at a technical school,” *Nil Belyaev* said. “In 1975 they had a meeting at which an old man who had been in the blockade told the students how things had been in 1942-43. And when he started speaking of all the terrible experiences of people during the period of starvation, many of the students became, you might say, very inattentive. When he had finished a girl came out and said that she did not understand what all this was about—so what if a person didn't eat those 125 or 150 grammes of bread one day! She could go a whole week without eating bread at all, and she felt fine.”

“That without a hint of irony?”

“It wasn't clear... It seems they think there's been enough said about the blockade.”

The fact that they are well-fed and happy—the girl who objected to the blockade veteran's talk and the doubting granddaughter—is, of course, a good thing. But the fact that these young people, it seems, are "moral dystrophics" (an expression from wartime Leningrad) is not good.

But it is the simplest thing of all to blame someone for stupidity, for prosperity, for heartlessness. Or to wave them aside, saying that they are an exception. It is worth thinking about—with the very best of intentions, even with the most sincere and public-minded sensitivity is it easy for someone who has never known hunger, to comprehend in the abstract, just like that, what it means. To comprehend Leningrad's long ordeal by starvation, and the meaning of 125 grammes of bread in such a state of hunger, or of a small piece of crust... No, you can't demand that of someone who grew up with a well-fed stomach, in warm surroundings. He has to be told about it patiently, convincingly, so as to stimulate his imagination. The succession of generations places an obligation on both those with the experience and those without it. New generations must know, must listen to the stories of people who endured all this, who lived through it.

"We've always tried not to talk about it, but sometimes I think we may have done the wrong thing, for neither Tamara's son nor Victor understand it. We've always avoided speaking about it to them. Once, when Tamara brought up the subject, Mishka interrupted, 'Big deal. Dad—he really went through a lot, at the front!'" (*Nina Sizenevskaya*).

Once when we were recording a blockade story we were astounded by a conversation that sprang up. A woman was telling the story and her daughter, son-in-law and grandchildren were listening. That often happened. Naturally it would have been better for ourselves and the teller of the story had there been no outside listeners, but that was not always possible. There was nowhere to retire to, apart from which both the family and the neighbours were consumed with curiosity. Incidentally, sometimes the comments of the listeners helped, for their disbelief, their sympathy, their exclamations and tears stimulated the memory.

The recording in question was not an easy one. The story was grim, and evidently the younger listeners had never heard all these details of their family's sufferings. They both wanted to know everything and were averse to know. They themselves would never have dreamt of asking questions, but were listening attentively, with keen interest. The first to crack was the son-in-law. He was not a young man and came from some other city.

"Why," he demanded, "why did there have to be such suffering? They should have surrendered the city. To avoid all this. Why did people have to be destroyed?"

The remark burst from him so simply, so naturally, with sadness for the stupidity and strangeness of what had happened in the past.

At first we did not quite understand what he had in mind. A bearded man of about 35, a worthy-looking citizen, we thought he must know the answer to his own question. Then we realised that he did not. That is, he had probably heard or read somewhere, at some time, about the orders given by the nazi Command, the Führer's plan to burn and destroy, but



now all that had begun to seem so crazy, so fantastic, that it had lost all semblance of reality.

Time, the passing of decades, imperceptibly simplifies the past, and we look at it through present-day standards of truth and ethics.

In some Western writings we have come across reasoning of a different kind, in which no part is played by incomprehension, by pain or sincerity, but which show, rather, glimpses of the self-justification of the capitulators, vengeful attempts to disguise inactivity as valour... In sympathetic tones they ask: was it really necessary to have such excessive agony, suffering and death? Were these really justified by military and other gains? Was it humane with regard to the civilian population? Paris, after all, was declared an open city... And other cities that capitulated remained unharmed. Later on the back of fascism had been broken, it had nevertheless been defeated—all in good time...

This theme, this argument is expressed in an open or concealed manner in various works, books and articles by a number of Western writers. How cynical and ignoble! If only they would be honest and carry their own logic through to its conclusion: it is surely true that the reason mankind today enjoys the beauties of the architectural and historical treasures of Paris, Prague, Athens and Budapest, and many other repositories of culture, that there exists today our European civilisation with its universities, libraries, and art galleries, and that we have not been plunged into the bottomless pit of the "thousand-year Reich", is that some people spared themselves less than others, because some defended their cities, their capitals, and their non-capitals to the last, in deadly battle, saving the future for all people. And Paris was saved for the French and for all mankind right here, in burning Stalingrad, in Leningrad, bombarded day and night, it was saved, too, outside Moscow... They were saved by that very agony and fortitude of which Leningraders speak.

When the European capitals were declared open cities, they were buoyed up by a secret hope: Hitler still had the Soviet Union ahead of him. Paris knew this. Moscow, Leningrad and Stalingrad knew that they might be the planet's last hope... There was no one for them to pin their hopes on.

"The Führer has decided to wipe the city of Petersburg from the face of the Earth," proclaimed secret directive l-a 1601/41 of the German Naval Staff entitled "The Future of the City of Petersburg", dated 22nd September 1941. Then followed the reasoning behind this. "There is no interest whatever in continuing the existence of this large populated point after the defeat of Soviet Russia. In precisely the same terms Finland has expressed her lack of interest in the continuance of the existence of this town right on her new frontier. It is proposed to ring it in a tight blockade and to flatten it to the ground by intensive artillery bombardment and constant aerial bombing. If as a result of the situation arising in the town a request to surrender is announced it will be rejected... On our side there is no interest whatever in preserving even part of the population of this big town."

This document was published in the materials of the Nuremberg Trial (*The International Military Tribunal*, Nuremberg, 1947, Vol. VIII, p. 113).

This instruction was repeated several times. For instance, on October 7, 1941, a secret directive of the Supreme Command said: "The Führer has again decided that the capitulation of Leningrad, or, later, Moscow, is not to be accepted even if it is offered by the enemy..." (Ibid.)

Keitel instructed the commander of the Army Group Centre that Leningrad must be cut off quickly and taken by starving out the population.

Moscow and Leningrad were doomed to total annihilation—together with their inhabitants. This was to mark the wide application of what Hitler had in mind: "The destruction of the Russians as a people." That meant exterminating them, completely destroying them as a biological, geographical and historical concept!

But the heroic feat of Leningraders was not a response to the threat of annihilation. ...Then, in the dark days of the blockade, and in the snow-drifts around Moscow, people only guessed of its existence, only imagined it. The threat was only confirmed in documentary form considerably later. No, here it was different—a simple and immutable wish to defend their way of life. We aren't slaves but free men, they said, we must come to grips with fascism, bar its way, and uphold freedom and human dignity.

Here is the justification and the meaning of Leningrad's amazing feat. Leningraders and all our people saved themselves and mankind from still greater sacrifices and agonies—this is why they were willing to face any suffering, any torture, without even giving a thought to the question of "open" cities. Someone had to do it...

To appreciate this one has to be aware of the extent of the ordeals borne by our people.

"Once somebody asked me this question," writes *Alexandra Sokolova*. 'Why,' they wanted to know, 'do you have so many medals—including one "For Victory over Germany"? After all, you didn't fight at the front,' they said. True, we weren't at the front, but saw and endured just as much as if we had been. I know the taste of every grass, the taste of peat, of the military belts which I still had from the Finnish war..."

No, that is not the usual tendency of old people to emphasise the superiority of their own contemporaries and times over the people and time of the present. For quite a while many of them had no wish to recall their time or talk about it. It even seemed an unnecessary cruelty.

She kept leaving it till later, till some future date, until the time came...

*We'll take vengeance for all we've shrouded in silence,
For all we've concealed from the rest of our land,*

the verse of Olga Bergholtz sounded over the radio in January 1943.

Whereas yesterday there might have been some point in those hurt by the war sparing the hearts of their fellow countrymen, today it is absolutely vital that the postwar generations should know as much as possible, in all its details, about what happened before their time, that they should get the feel of it all. They have to know what price was paid for it all, know not only

about those who fought but also about those who were able to stand fast, those who, unarmed, could only give a message to the world by their steadfastness. They must know what war is, and learn to cherish peace.

"We're very glad that now everybody lives well, we're all well fed and clothed, we make the children eat more, and all the time we recall how Larissa used to wake from hunger at seven in the morning and ask for yesterday's bread!

"We would say: Larissa, there isn't any bread.

"Well then, give me tomorrow's, she'd reply."

That's from a letter written by *Vera Pavlova* and sent to us from the town of Tosno.

No longer young and, of course, like nearly all those who survived the blockade, with shattered health, *Yekaterina Yankovskaya-Ladyzhenskaya*, whom we saw as a young woman in a prewar photo (a rare beauty there), declared: "If anyone said they'd restore my health, beauty and youth and I'd have to go through that ordeal again, I wouldn't want to, I wouldn't agree."

From *M. M. Khokhlova* (18 Kontorskaya St.) came a letter saying:

"In those blockade days I kept wondering, how, if I survived, I would feel as I recalled that terrible time. I haven't asked anyone what kind of feelings remain with them, but for a long while I had a sense of revulsion. True, that's now wiped away, has dulled with time. In our mouths my husband and I still have the feel of the hunger we experienced. Sometimes he says: 'I'm not hungry but my teeth are on fire, it's the blockade, that damned blockade!' And I'm not hungry but my tongue's nagging at me."

"I had yet another idea—to record for ever the day I would feel that I had eaten enough" (*Klavdia Dubrovina*, 71 Serdobolskaya St.).

"I've just heard over the radio that ... you're starting to collect stories about the life of Leningraders during the blockade... Although some young people, when they hear reminiscences of blockade survivors, sneer and say that the real heroes of the blockade are all in the Piskarevsky Cemetery" (*Alexandra Chikanina*, 5/2 Mytninskaya St.).

The true story of the ordeals of millions of people in the blockade years, a truthful documentary account from the lips of Leningraders who experienced it all personally, may seem cruel even now. But (we hope) it will touch everyone's heart. Including the heart of the girl who said she could live without that 125 grammes of bread.

"I walked past a building site where some carpenters were planing wood. I picked up two clean shavings from a heap, put one in my mouth and tucked the other one away as a reserve.

"I did not regret leaving the editorial office, without asking for a krone, even when I was outside the door, and began to be tortured by hunger again. From my pocket I took out the second shaving and thrust it in my mouth. I felt better again. Why hadn't I done this before?"

This was not the blockade, it was the young Knut Hamsun. His first well-known novel *Hunger*, to a large extent autobiographical, was written in 1890. It is perhaps still the only work in world literature which has man's hunger as its basic theme, the object of careful research by the writ-

er. Hunger plunged the novel's hero into an isolated existence which ruled out mutual understanding with the fortunate well-fed people around him.

Hunger sets the hero apart. The well-fed do not understand the hungry.

Hamsun's hunger and that of blockaded Leningraders did not differ physiologically but psychologically—the hunger of the blockade was an enemy sent by fascism. It was an act of hatred, of war, a participant in the battle waged by Leningraders against the fascist enemy.

Exhausted and half crazed from hunger, Hamsun's lonely hero rushes about prosperous Christiania. And not only will the hearts and minds of the readers respond to what happens to the hero, but somehow even our stomachs and our glands. The reader really seems to live through the various stages of hunger. It is not a simple matter even for a writer of great talent to express the power of hunger. Only his own experiences, his own memory of his hungry youth, of the tormenting years of chronic under-feeding give this novel its penetrating authenticity. Hamsun's portrayal of hunger is regarded as one of the most powerful in world literature. Love and hunger rule the world, Schiller said, and repeating these words on more than one occasion, Gorky considered them the most truthful and fitting epigraph to the long history of mankind's suffering.

The hunger of Hamsun's novel and that of the Leningrad blockade are two different things. Clearly, mass starvation is a special situation. Nevertheless, what strikes one at first sight is the similarity of the two conditions.

"I had to eat whatever came my way. I remember coming home and so wanting to eat! At the time I lived in Voitik Street. There I had some firewood lying by the stove—one or two logs. So I took a log (it was pine, I recall) and began to gnaw. I was desperate to eat. I chewed and chewed away at that log, and resin oozed out. That fragrance of resin gave me some sense of enjoyment that I was at least chewing something. I had to eat something, otherwise death was inevitable from starvation, and this is even worse than being killed under bombardment. One dies a very terrible death from starvation" (*Yelena Nikitina*, 26 Stachek Prospekt).

Here is Knut Hamsun again:

"The food commenced to take effect. I suffered much from it, and could not keep it down for any length of time. I had to empty my mouth a little at every dark corner I came to. I struggled to master this nausea which threatened to hollow me out anew, clenched my hands, and tried to fight it down; stamped on the pavement, and gulped down furiously whatever sought to come up. All in vain."*

Here, as in any genuine literature, there is a challenge to squeamishness and indifference. There is love for man, and consequently a sense of compassion, which is not appalled by anything. A man agonises because he cannot keep down food obtained at such cost, and the author suffers for the man and for his helplessness in the face of that very "irony of life" of which Dostoyevsky wrote with such passion and pain in *The Idiot*.

Hunger, the work of the young Hamsun, seems to ask, again and again, the question: which is the stronger within you—human compassion and an

* Knut Hamsun, *Hunger*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1920, p. 152.

understanding of another human being, or aesthetic fastidiousness?

There is a far greater test of such feelings and of our ability to look at a suffering human being without turning away—that is, recollections of the blockade. Yes, a man in agony from bitter hunger is far from being an aesthetic sight! For this people should be ready, if they want to see, hear and try to understand the whole truth, and not simply a segment of it.

It is impossible to understand the entire vileness of fascist crimes, “infiltrating death” into the city (to use Olga Bergholtz’s very apt expression), without speaking of mass starvation, of this “hired killer” of the nazis.

For the hunger of the blockade, like that of the camps (and like Auschwitz and other crematoriums), was part of the arsenal of the principal weapons the fascists were using to carry out their plans to exterminate entire peoples, to depopulate whole countries.

Incidentally, many of our most relentless and truthful tellers of blockade stories were those from the medical field—doctors, nurses, and sanitary personnel, those who are merciful by virtue of their very profession. They will tell you about a starving man, or about mass hunger, without any attempt at glossing over the horrors, for in their eyes no disease (and dystrophy, especially alimentary dystrophy, is a dreadful disease), and no manifestation of disease, humiliates a human being. For example, one woman doctor told us about herself, of how she had walked about the streets “forever wet”, like a baby—hunger had wasted all her muscles, she was mere skin and bone. “I could hardly walk, but I worked” (*Maria Yershova*).

Another woman doctor, *G. A. Samovarova*, recalled: “People ate all the cats, they ate all the dogs there had been. The men started dying first, for men are muscular and have little fat. In women, even small women, there is a bigger fat layer. But women were also dying, although they had more endurance. People turned into some kind of old crocks, because, you know, the fat layer was destroyed, so that all the muscles were visible, and the blood vessels too. At the same time they were withered and flabby.”

Anna Kondratyeva, another doctor, said: “Those fearsome expressionless faces, those unmoving eyes, those noses, with the skin taut on the bone.”

But at first there might even be a heightening of various feelings, emotions and fantasies. We actually know that in this way hermits and anchorites used to seek deliberately to induce the visions they were eager to have.

Third degree alimentary dystrophy is not only a skeleton without muscles (it is even painful to sit down in such a state), it also means that the brain is devoured by the stomach.

When hunger caught up with a person, that human being writhed with pain and was in as much agony as someone seriously wounded...

“The girls bore up better, but the 12-year-old boy, Tolya, suffered badly, for he was not getting nearly enough food and sometimes he would lie on the creaking bed, turning and tossing all the time in an effort to deaden the feeling of hunger somehow. He would keep tossing and turning

until his mother shouted at him, but then, later on, he would start again. After some time I heard that he had died..." (M. M. Khokhlova).

Yes, hunger in "old", classical literature, and mass hunger (and, furthermore, intentionally organised starvation, as in the time of fascism) are phenomena of different levels and meaning.

Mass hunger existed in the past, too, but detailed, serious accounts of it are found only in chronicles.

This is an account of mass hunger by a Byelorussian chronicler from the village of Barkulabovo:

"And when the spring of 1602 did come, many of the people from that influx began to die; five, even thirty to a single grave. And there was a great multitude of the sick, hungry and distended. And it was fearful to behold this Divine wrath. But in towns people buried one to a grave: the priests performed the last trials.

"Of those who walked to the lower reaches, all perished there, only a few remained. And so they died, in cities, in streets and roads, forests and wastelands, at crossroads, and in empty houses and barns. Father was parted from son, son from father, mother from children, children from mother, husband from wife, wife from husband. Having left their children, they went their separate ways through towns and villages, and after that, they knew nothing of one another. Almost all died.

"And when the newcomers stood begging for bread at the gate or in someone's house, father with son, son with father, mother with daughter, daughter with mother, brother with brother, sister with sister, husband with wife, they did utter these powerful, plaintive words, saying bitterly: 'Mother darling, my dear, my star, give us a piece of bread!' And they would stand by the gate from early morning to dinner and to noon, begging thus. And there in the street someone would die.

"...And if they asked for broth, they would say: 'Mummy dearest, my precious gem, give thy child a tiny spoonful of broth.'"

In the book, *The Geography of Hunger*, Joshué de Castro, Brazilian scientist and President of the Executive Committee of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, wrote: "For each study of the problems of hunger there are over a thousand publications on the problem of war. A ratio of more than a thousand to one! Yet, ... the human waste resulting from hunger is considerably greater than that from wars and epidemics put together. The damage has been more extensive in the number of victims, and a great deal more serious in its biological and social consequences."*

Later he goes on: "Western science and technique, brilliantly victorious over the forces of nature, failed almost entirely to do battle with hunger. The scientists kept a pointed silence about the living conditions of the

* Joshué de Castro, *The Geography of Hunger*, Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1952, p. 5.

world's hungry masses, consciously or unconsciously, they became accomplices in the conspiracy. The social reality of hunger stayed outside their laboratory walls."*

Modern literature, documentary and fiction, about the nazi concentration camps and about the Leningrad blockade, like all the literature of the Second World War has reflected—and continues to reflect—a bitter truth of the twentieth century. Hunger, mass hunger has become an important weapon in the arsenal of recent and potential murderers of the peoples.**

Not to write about this "weapon" today, to forget it, is tantamount to "forgetting" the stockpiles of atomic death.

The psychological difference between mass, blockade hunger and Ham-sun type of hunger is fundamental. Although the author writes of what he himself knows very well, has himself experienced, he has not experienced it in conditions of mass hunger. Here the analogy of a journalist's memory of wartime trenches comes to mind. The journalist visited the frontline, came under heavy fire, facing death, like the soldiers themselves. The difference in their experiences, in their comprehension of life at the front is nevertheless vast, even fundamental. The journalist came there, sat in a trench, knowing that he could walk away from it all. (Even if he wouldn't, even if he wasn't intending to.) The soldier knows that he cannot leave, cannot walk away even if he wanted to.

This is the difference—a gigantic difference.

It is the same difference as exists between the hunger of Knut Ham-sun's hero and the hunger of beleaguered Leningraders. For most blockaded Leningraders there was no place to which they could run from lethal, unbearable hunger. It was all round the bullet-riddled, shell-pocked city, pressing the whole of it to the gulf, to the lake. It held human beings in its iron grip.

INFILTRATED INTO THE CITY

Hunger three centuries ago and hunger today are the same thing. The suffering is the same, the sensation is the same. But people had a special attitude to the hunger of the blockade. It was an enemy infiltrated by nazism, an opponent that interfered with working and fighting, it was war.

One of the authors of this book fought, autumn and winter, right until spring 1942, near Pushkin. He sat there in the trenches, and each night

* Ibid., p. 8.

** Of the nazi way of using this weapon Joshué de Castro wrote: "The Reich's 'plan of organised hunger' had a solid scientific base and well-defined objectives. Here was a powerful weapon of war, with high destructive power, which was to be used on the broadest scale and with maximum efficiency. And that is just what the Germans did leaving aside all sentimentalism, and manipulating food supplies in keeping with the particular aims of this sort of 'geopolitics hunger', as Karl Haushofer and his clique of German geopoliticians might well have called it" (Ibid., p. 250).

behind him, at his back, the sky was lit up by the glow of Leningrad fires, the crimson flashes piercing the starry darkness. Ahead of him enemy rockets rose into the sky, and behind him the city burnt. In the daytime the city's silhouette was etched distinctly and in detail against the clear sky. The multitudinous chimneys were not smoking, and the air over Leningrad was clean. Only here and there thick, sooty columns of smoke rose from charred ruins. Every day, at the same hour, fascist planes glided over the frontline on their way to drop their bombs, and towards evening, taking over from them, heavy missiles sped invisibly, but with a slight whooshing sound, towards the city.

In his battalion there were cases of dystrophy and swelling due to hunger, for the soldiers' rations were meagre—while not as bad as those of civilians—very meagre, very skimpy. But the war made no allowances for this, and soldiers had to remain at their posts, go out on reconnaissance, shovel snow from the trenches, or drag missiles and ammunition from place to place, or clean weapons. All else apart, war also means hard physical labour, with no days off or lunch breaks.

The Germans did not stint their mines or their shells. On some days there were only a few dozen soldiers left on the battalion's sector. The German trenches by the railway were only about 50 metres from ours.

Impaling some small loaves on bayonets, the Germans would raise them above the parapets and propose that our troops come over to them, promising them a full stomach and a tranquil life as prisoners. They argued that the soldiers of the Leningrad Front were doomed to die, and that if they did not starve to death they would be killed. Listening to that was not so easy. Yet there was not a single desertion from his battalion





The posters say: "Summon your courage to do your duty to Motherland! Defend Leningrad, ward off the enemy, destroy the accursed nazis to the last man!"

"Let us summon up strength to defend our city! Leningrad shall never surrender, we shall not smear our honour!"

"The enemy is at our gates! Spare no effort to defend Leningrad from the hateful nazis! Sacrifice your life if need be!"

throughout that winter.

Although he went through the whole of that long war, where there were offensives, victories, attacks and various fronts, although he not only saw it all but lived through it, it is hard for him to explain how those starving, frozen, enfeebled troops of the Leningrad Front managed to defend, to safeguard the city, to hold the defences outside the city in shallow, fire-raked trenches on exposed lowlands, and more than that, to launch attack after attack, to press the enemy and on some sectors to advance, giving the German Command no chance to withdraw and transfer divisions from around Leningrad to other fronts. Now, after so many years, it seems inexplicable how and why that in December, at the hardest time, it became clear to our troops that the Germans would not be able to pierce their line, to break through.

Leningraders had to get to their factories, to work, to do spells of duty on the rooftops, to save industrial plants, houses, their nearest and dearest—children, fathers, husbands, wives, to keep the front secure, look after the wounded, put out the fires, get fuel, fetch water, carry provisions and shells, build pillboxes and camouflage buildings.

Valya Moroz was a 15-year-old during the blockade. Her father had

joined a volunteer citizens' battalion, her elder sister also wanted to go to the front, but had been unlucky, and was working at a military hospital. In December 1941, her father died, in another two months her sister also died, and at the end of March her mother, too. Valya was left on her own. She was helped to get a job at a factory as a trainee turner, and made parts for missile stabilisers. All through the blockade she worked.

The word "worked" has to be understood in the meaning it had at the time. Every movement was slowed down. Hands were slowly raised, fingers moved slowly. No one ran, they walked slowly, raising their feet with difficulty. It is impossible for the healthy, well-fed young person of today to comprehend such feebleness, such a style of walking.

"It was roughly the feeling that your foot wouldn't leave the ground. Can you understand? The feeling that when you had to put your foot on a step, it just refused to obey. It was like it is in dreams sometimes. It seems you're just about to run, but your legs won't work. Or you want to shout out, and you've no voice.

"I recall the feeling when you just had to drag your feet along somehow (it was when mother was alive still, and I had to go out), when you needed to get your foot up onto a step, and for a moment or two your leg wouldn't function, wouldn't obey you, and you could have fallen. But then, despite everything you'd summon your energies and somehow or other raise your foot."

To get some appreciation of the work done by Leningraders in this condition, to comprehend what it meant to repair guns, to go upstairs to attics for your stint of firewatching, to clear away obstructions, you must first and foremost understand the protracted nature and intensity of blockade hunger; it not only lasted a long time, but it had a strong and profound impact on people. You have to understand the effect hunger had on a person's behaviour, how it tested his mind, his heart and his faith. And it didn't strike at man in general, but concretely at the individual, for each one had his own battle with hunger, and those battles took different courses. Only after you've understood what hunger is, have grasped its strength, and studied its scale and its effects can you get a feeling of what was accomplished by Leningraders. Unless you do that you won't appreciate the real magnitude of the courage displayed by the city's defenders.

Sometimes details of hunger break through unexpectedly, from chance, revealing remarks which may not always be recognised as such immediately.

Tamara Haltunen working in a hospital for dystrophic cases, recalled that, when they put a patient in the bath he screamed. "Bare bones, he couldn't even sit, he had no flesh at all!"

Another woman, *Maya Babich*, now a psychiatrist, began her account: "There were three women and myself—a girl. I was the youngest and considered to be strong. Apparently I wasn't too bad."

"How old were you then?"

"Sixteen—I used to take the ration cards and queue up to get bread for everyone, each of them separately. I would catch myself thinking—if only they'd give just a little separate bit to make up the weight. When they did, I'd sometimes eat that little piece... Then I'd come in and hand each one

her portion. The little bit was like payment for work. Sometimes you'd stand and stand and get nothing because there was no bread. When I brought the bread home they'd be lying on sofas or beds in the room. There were some sheepskin coats, and the women also wore their winter felt boots, and lay beneath padded quilts. They were all lying down. There was a wick lamp there, burning oil of some sort, flickering away. And there was a *burzhuika*, and by it a bucket of water, which froze solid, right through, by night time. Later on they would get up and break away a piece of ice with an axe so they could boil water. They took turns to get up. We all drank this dirty water.

"That was at the beginning of January. A schoolfriend, Tolya, came to see me at home. He was a proper poet, head in the clouds, and used to talk about the problem 'to be or not to be'. At school he'd been a boy with elevated interests. And he came, his face a greyish-green colour, his eyes bulging, and said: 'Have you still got your cat?' We had had a cat. I said: 'Heavens, no! Why?' 'We want to eat him!' His mother and grandmother were lying at home. Then he left. He looked so terrible, so dirty, so emaciated. He was swaying as he went off. Only a year before he'd been quite different. We'd get together and discuss lofty things. And here he was, suddenly talking about the cat. I meant to go and see him in a week or two (he lived in another street). I didn't go straight away. It was most frightening to go out, and you subconsciously tried to protect yourself from what you might see. It was intuitive, somehow. Still, I went to where they lived. I reached the first floor—the door was never shut, and anyone who wanted to could go in, enter any of the rooms, take whatever they liked. It was an elegant house, both comfortable and beautiful. It had once belonged to a millionaire. In peacetime there had been carpets on the stairs. He lived in a room in a communal flat. I went into his room. It was dark, with something glimmering. All three of them lay dead—Tolya, his mother, his grandmother. There was terrible filth in the room. It was cold. Evidently they hadn't the strength to heat the stove. So they'd all died. I felt dreadful. I didn't go into the other rooms, but turned back."

It is not possible to recreate an apartment of the blockade days in any museum, any model or panorama, just as no one can portray the cold, the anguish, the hunger...

As they reminisce, survivors comment on the broken windows, or the furniture burnt as firewood as having been the most striking, the most extraordinary things. But at the time the appearance of the apartments was really startling only to children, and those who arrived from the front. As, for instance, happened to *Vladimir Alexandrov*.

"You'd keep knocking and knocking for a long time, and wouldn't hear a sound. You already had the impression that everyone inside had already died. Then you'd hear some shuffling, and the door would open. Inside, where the temperature was the same as it was in the street, a creature wrapped up in God knows what would make its appearance. You'd hand it a packet of rusks of some kind, or some cakes, or something else. And what struck you? The absence of the slightest quiver of emotion."

"Not even if you brought food?"

“Not even then. After all, in many starving people the appetite had already atrophied.”

At the front the fighting men imagined that the spoonfuls of millet, and the rusks they'd saved and put aside from their meagre rations, would be greeted with delight, but at times they were received in another way, already with indifference...

When the war was over *Alexei Bezzubov* was transferred to Germany. The Soviet Military Administration in Germany was set up, and as a food industry worker with a wide education in his field, Bezzubov was appointed head of the scientific department of the food industry. In Germany he had to supervise university laboratories, research institutes, and planning bodies, so it was not surprising that fate led him to Professor Ziegelmeier. It had to happen sooner or later. Ziegelmeier was looked upon as a leading nutrition scientist. Earlier he had headed the Munich Institute of Nutrition. Consequently these two specialists in what seems to be one of the most peaceful sciences met and talked. What could be more beneficial, more concerned for people, than food science?

In the course of conversation, however, it emerged that during the war Professor Ziegelmeier had occupied a high post—deputy quartermaster of Hitler's army. As an outstanding expert, he was called in to help tackle one of the Command's most crucial problems—blockaded Leningrad. The direct attack on the city had bogged down. Our troops had held firmly within the blockade encirclement, not allowing the nazis to cross the ring at any point. Then the nazi General Staff had demanded a consultation



with him. He pondered over the question and advised how to ensure that Leningraders starved to death as quickly as possible. That was what Goebels had in mind when, making the best of things, he noted in his diary for September 10, 1941: "We shall not trouble ourselves with demands for Leningrad's capitulation. It must be destroyed by a virtually scientific method."

Ziegmeyer calculated how long the blockade might last, given existing rations, how long it would be before people started dying, how the process of dying would develop, and how long it would take them all to die.

"Ziegmeyer told me he knew precisely how much food we had for how many people there were in Leningrad. True, he miscalculated. I told him afterwards that our position had been even worse than he imagined. 'You did not take account of the numbers of people who came with the army from Leningrad, Novgorod and other regions,' I said. Ziegmeyer was astounded, and kept asking me: 'However did you hold out? How could you? It's quite impossible!' I wrote a deposition that it was physically impossible to live on such a ration—because of that it wasn't worth risking German soldiers. Leningraders would die anyway, but it was essential not to let a single person through the frontline. The more of them stayed there, the sooner they'd die, and we'd enter the city without any trouble, without losing a single German soldier!' Then he said: 'After all, I'm an old nutrition expert. I don't understand what kind of miracle took place in your city!'"

Alexei Bezzubov could have told him a great deal more about his own work. The Vitamin Institute, where he was in charge of the chemical technology department, was asked by the City Executive Committee to head the work of preparing pine infusions in order somehow to prevent vitamin deficiency among the population. The decision was taken on 18th November 1941. They even dug out archive material dating back two centuries, to a time when Russia exported pine needles as a remedy for scurvy. They found documents explaining how pine needles cured scurvy during the war against the Swedes. Bezzubov and his staff drew up instructions on how to prepare anti-scurvy pine infusion on an industrial scale, how to make it at home and how to use this infusion to add vitamin to foodstuffs. At the very time that Ziegmeyer was embarking on a study of data supplied to him by the General Staff, Bezzubov was studying how to filter the infusion and package it. At the same time he was finding out how to make use in military and civilian hospitals of sprouting peas.

In a month, in the second half of December, Bezzubov and the surviving members of his staff went round to check how installations turning out pine needle infusions were functioning. They visited military units, military hospitals, institutions for children, and inpatients' clinics. The installations were operating at 46 factories and six research institutions.

In the effort to combat frost-bite they sought a means of obtaining carotene.

Early in January 1942 people began to succumb to pellagra, and it became essential to procure nicotinic acid—Vitamin B. Tobacco dust was collected from attics and ventilation shafts of tobacco factories, and from this nicotinic acid was extracted.

He could have told Ziegelmeier how they learnt to treat alimentary dystrophy. The most effective remedy proved to be protein and vitamin preparations. Casein, yeast and albumen were rich in full-value protein. Bezzubov helped organise the supply of casein to Leningrad, but even before that he had succeeded in making use of the remains of burnt sugar from the Badayevsky Stores. This renowned sugar, melted by fire, soaked in water from firepumps and mixed with earth and sand—we heard so much about it! Dozens of tons were extracted. There were boulders of sweet black earth, and Bezzubov had the idea of washing the surfaces with water and then processing the mixture at a sweet factory. He had worked there as chief engineer before the war. From the black mess, which Leningraders went on for a long time digging from the charred desert, they began to make boiled sweets. In taste they resembled a well-known pre-revolutionary sweet—Landrin.

These boiled sweets with their slight bitter tang had been very popular in Russia.

His department studied the question of how much carotene and vitamins were contained in dandelion, nettle and goosefoot, and what could be made from them...

Ziegelmeier knew nothing of all this. Anyway, it was unlikely he would have taken notice of such trifles. As an expert in roughly the same field as Bezzubov, he calculated how many days the average Leningrader could survive without protein and fat. He went in for global calculations. He was confronted by a task, an experiment carried out on millions, unique of its kind. The bigger the population under experiment, the less effect would any anomalies have and the more accurate the result would be.

Energy cannot come from nothing. A century back Ziegelmeier's great compatriot, Dr. Robert Mayer, formulated the law of the conservation of energy. Both Bezzubov and Ziegelmeier had studied the way the human organism was subject to that law, had studied it for entirely opposite aims.

For the heart, the lungs, the whole organism to function, it has to be supplied with fuel. Ziegelmeier knew quite well that warmth could not arise from the soul, the will, or conviction; however much a man wanted to warm himself, what he needed for this was not thoughts or faith, but calories, food. The essential minimum is calculated to be 2,000 calories a day.

The Leningraders were not getting these calories.

When he saw that the expected results were not forthcoming Ziegelmeier devised some new standards. But Leningrad continued to hold out. Ziegelmeier made some final allowances—he had to save the law of the conservation of energy.

The people living in this city must die, were bound to die, yet they went on living, they even worked, in violation of the immutable laws of

science. The rations of Leningraders were known, as was the air temperature, the quality of bread, in fact everything was reckoned up—125 grammes, 150 grammes, even 250 grammes was not enough, without other foodstuffs, to ensure the physiological existence of the organism in such cold.

Ziegmeyer did not understand what he was leaving out of his calculations. He could not explain to the General Staff why his calculations did not work out.

Now he cross-questioned the Soviet professor on the subject, but even Bezzubov could not fully explain this phenomenon. He spoke to Ziegmeyer—a scientist, an expert on nutrition, who had advised hunger—quite politely, stifling his own feelings. He talked of faith in victory, of the spiritual reserves of Leningraders, which had not been accounted for in the German professor's "research".

To be frank, he himself was not altogether clear about it. He himself had been through it all, had seen it all, yet with all his vast experience he did not quite understand where people had found their strength...

At first people had not regarded this invisible murderer as the most dangerous one. What was killing people then—and this was clear to everyone—were other things: bombs and shells. August, September and October saw Leningrad under constant alert—any day there could be a new offensive. The enemy is at the gates, was the cry that went up in every Leningrader's heart, stifling all other alarms.

Soldiers and sailors would come into homes, shift the baby's cot as far out of the way as possible, then brick up the window, making an embrasure in it. And everyone would help them! The enemy's tanks were just four kilometres from the Kirov Works.

Although people were worried by the thought of starvation, of this ally of the enemy* that in four to six weeks was to become the chief and most fearful of the killers of Leningraders, it still did not seem so terribly dangerous to them.

Here is the account given by *Galina Petrova* (39 Fontanka Embankment):

"They introduced the ration card system quite quickly. I remember that we did not even take all that we were entitled to."

"That was at the beginning?"

"Yes. At first we took all the bread, and then we found there was bread left over at home—there were rolls and loaves left. Later on we realised that when they'd allowed us bread and we hadn't taken it we could have had it and made rusks with it. But to begin with we didn't give it a thought. There were my father, mother, sister and myself in Leningrad. My sister got married, and in August they went away to Sochi, and my father, my mother and I remained here."

"In this same house?"

"No, at the time we lived at No. 17 Gogol Street, in the very house that Gogol had lived in."

* "The situation here will remain tense until our ally—hunger—makes itself felt," wrote F. Halder, Chief of the German General Staff (see his *War Diary*).

For a long time people clung to the illusion (while at the same time expecting the very worst) that before long, by some miracle, "everything would revert to normal". The psychological state of unexpectedness lasted for months. Although it would seem to be a momentary state.

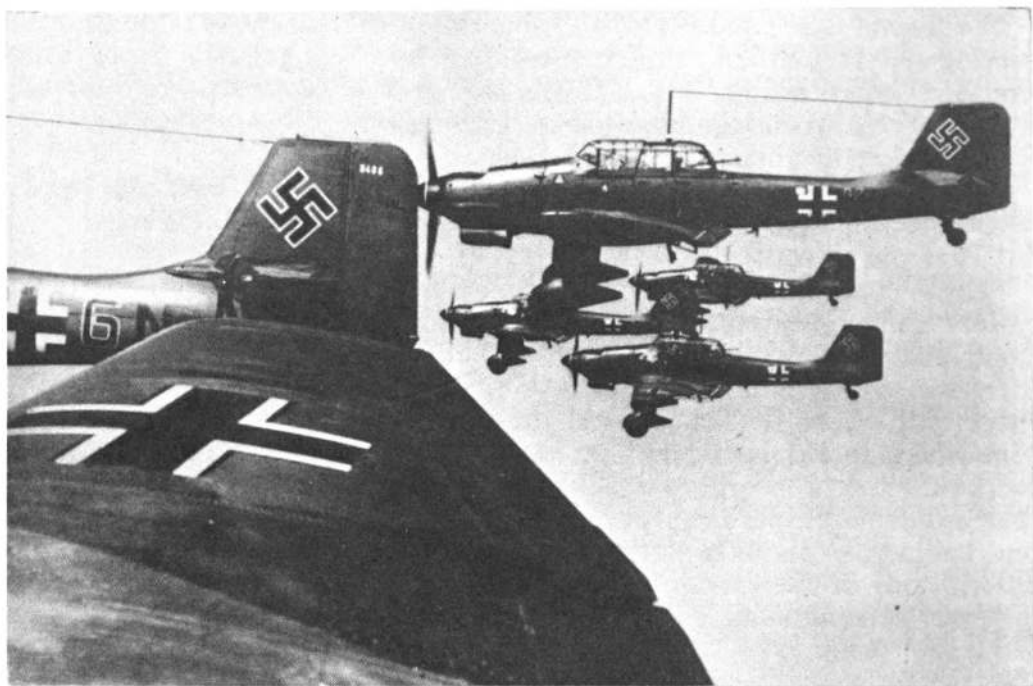
The feeling of unexpectedness lasted.

Yevgeny Lyapin, a mathematician (208 Moscow Prospekt), draws attention to this psychological outlook of the early days of the war.

"That was in August?"

"From August to mid-September. As for the idea that someone deliberately spread rumours, I don't know about that, I didn't hear that. I think people were simply trying to 'calm themselves down'. One thing, there was at that time the improbable rumour that firing could be heard in the city because the enemy had dropped parachutists who had hidden somewhere in the cemetery and were now firing mortars into different parts of the city in order to sow panic. Ideas of that kind were typical of that moment. People simply could not grasp what was really going on. No one had any experience to go by. On top of that, they still remembered descriptions of the war in the West—there had been all manner of tricks, like the parachute raids on Belgium and France. That was the kind of thing they were expecting now. Then it all turned out otherwise. No one was in the cemetery, there were no mortars being fired at us, but the frontline had shifted closer to the city and long-range artillery could fire at us from a distance of 80 kilometres. I don't remember when it started, but it was beyond the Moscow Railway Station. They didn't fire just twice or three times a day, the artillery was thundering incessantly, it was a battle going on 20 kilometres from Leningrad, at Pavlovsk. It was all clear to us. We already knew now that the front was advancing on Leningrad. The enemy had drawn near, the battle was raging right outside the city, and probably the fate of Leningrad depended upon it. All the same, there were no heavy bombardments of the city. Even isolated bursts of fire ceased. In short, they were intending to take us by panic, but there was none.

"What in fact was ahead of us? That became clear, to my mind, if I'm not mistaken, on the seventh or eighth of September, when there was another air raid warning. There had already been many of those, and we did not take them seriously. I looked out of the window—I was living near the Varshavsky Station at the time. First of all we heard the ack-ack guns firing with particular force and fury. Looking at the sky I noticed an unusual thing—instead of individual planes looking like little dots high in the sky, so tiny you could scarcely see them, there came a great mass of planes, flying in a definite, clearly planned, complicated formation. They were massed in such a way that their movement seemed menacing. And they really were menacing. Shells burst around them, we could see bursts of fire from the ack-ack guns. But the planes moved steadily on: there was no looping, none of the complicated aerobatics we had seen in August. Even when one of them fell, wreathed in clouds of smoke, the others carried steadily on. It was obvious that this was no casual raid but a massive onslaught. The first wave came over, then the second, and a third. Something was going on, it was obvious. Suddenly, as I looked towards the south, I noticed a great, growing cloud of smoke. It was the first time



there had been such a thing. The cloud grew higher and higher, reaching to heights of tens, hundreds of metres. We understood—the cause was the appearance of those enemy aircraft. And we paid dearly for it all later.

“At that time we still knew nothing about hunger, we hadn’t thought of it at all. Our rations were good. We were getting so much bread it was quite impossible to eat it all (600-800 grammes—what Leningrader had ever eaten so much bread in one day?). So no one had paid any attention to that side of things. But, jumping ahead, I must say that the bombing and, in fact, the destruction of those stores cost the lives of many Leningraders.”

The clarification of these facts and the evaluation of their consequences is a matter for the historians. We were not studying historical documents, we were listening to the stories of living people. Between us and the past was human memory, a precarious bridge, eroded by time. Some people had the past preserved in their heads, whereas for others memory had been replaced by what they had read in books or seen in films, and they themselves had not realised how this had happened. Dates were shifted. The first time Leningrad was bombed was on September 6, 1941. Two days later, on the 8th, the second raid took place, in the course of which the Badayevsky Stores were bombed. In many people’s minds these two dates became fused into one, and it seemed to them that the Badayevsky Stores were bombed on the very first day of the bombing. Many people made such mistakes.

We were not trying to clarify the historical picture but rather the condition of people at that time. In that sense it was vital to know what, precisely, each one remembered of those years. What was engraved in the

heart, what remained forever of the life under blockade in the spirit, in the mind, how much of those experiences lived on within man?

THE HIRED ASSASSIN

Hunger was already at our side, in the city.

Food rationing became more austere, the city was gathering up everything that could be gathered up, preserved and put to use. All kinds of substitutes were employed in the bakeries and canteens.

Each individual, too, began to look around, trying to discover whether anything edible remained, and if so, where and what use could be made of it.

So far hunger was only groping at the throats of its victims, but everybody was already feeling alarmed and uneasy—there was an assassin close by... That is what Leningraders themselves say about those days.

Ivan Korotkov, an artist:

"Hunger gradually began to get its grip. What did I do? What steps did I take? I started going round the apartments of all my evacuated friends. First of all Taya Grigorievna's room. I can't remember how I got in (I think there was someone living next door). I went in and rummaged in all the cupboards and took rusks of any kind—mouldy, green, anything, and some other things. Altogether I collected a small bag. I was extremely pleased to have got quite a good amount. I also went to someone else's



flat, and there I also collected all the stale bits that were left. Later one of my students brought me some oilcake—briquettes of it this size. He brought three. That was something tremendous—three briquettes of oilcake!”

“Which month was that?”

“October and November. It was cold, a time when there was already nothing left. Then I found a little bit of flour at home. After that it turned out that I had some fish glue for priming and some bottles of linseed oil on the windowsill... Somehow I realised that things were pretty bad. I didn’t start eating it all at once but used what I’d found a little at a time.”

Nil Belyaev, former radio employee:

“What was characteristic of those months when the starvation period began? It was that you began to make use of everything that could possibly be eaten. What kind of things? There was oilcake, made from sunflower seed, and you could get pieces of oilcake at the market. A tiny piece, a thin sheet, cost 30 roubles. Somehow that remained the price for several months, until it ran out. A piece of animal hide about 10 cm by 10 cm—from a cow or a horse (you could make a kind of jelly with it), or a little slab of carpenter’s glue—you could buy these at the market, and each of them cost about 30 roubles. If you made jelly from a small piece of hide, it did not turn out sufficiently good and thick, but if you added carpenter’s glue, then boiled it up, it turned out well, nice and thick. Of course it was quite disgusting to eat but if you flavoured it with mustard, pepper and vinegar, which we received regularly on our ration cards (in fact they were the only things we received regularly) and got it down you somehow, you could just about manage to exist. But in 1942 you couldn’t get anything—there was no glue, no oilcake. All that had vanished. So the only thing left was to follow the example of the polar explorers in the stories about Amundsen or Nansen—to switch to leather belts. But that didn’t work out very well. Because explorers had had rawhide belts and reins. This was untanned hide which had not been treated with any chemicals, had not, so to speak, been processed. But what of our leather belts? They were no good. You’d cut them up, crush them, then try to boil them, and however long you boiled them, they’d stay tough. And if you could just get them softened, and you ate it all, then, as they say, it would give you no joy, no joy whatever.”

The hungry citizen tried to “utilize” all the most seemingly incredible things. The young trade school pupils displayed particularly naive and futile ingenuity. According to many accounts they were virtually the first to die. Alone, without parents or close relatives, whatever food they got, they ate it immediately, and then sold their clothes and shoes to buy more food.

Leningraders who endured the blockade with greater restraint believe that too much ingenuity was ruinous. It often killed a person even before hunger achieved its purpose. Yet even knowing that, people could not restrain themselves. Hunger knew no mercy.

Zoya Bernikovich, member of the Hermitage staff:

"Of course we had to eat anything. I ate belts, I ate glue, I consumed drying oil—I fried bread in it. Then somebody said that you could make delicious pancakes with mustard. What a queue there was for mustard! "

"What do you mean—they were just made from mustard?"

"You had to know what you were doing. I put in two packets (I'd bought 15 packets, thinking I'd have a reserve, and maybe I'd live). You had to soak it for seven days, pour off the water and then pour on some more, to get rid of the bitter taste. Well, in the end I cooked two pancakes. I ate one, then began to shout like a lunatic. I had such gripping pains! A lot of people died from it. After all, it was mustard. People said that it ate your guts. After they'd got the doctor to me he asked: 'How many pancakes have you eaten?' 'Only one,' I replied. 'It's your good fortune that you haven't eaten more. Your good fortune!' ' So I remained alive. I bought Landrin, and drank sweet tea—you could sometimes get saccharin. True, in spring there was the allotment. I was so happy that no one had touched mine. Can you imagine what kind of grass or weed I ate? Goose-foot and cow-wheat. Perhaps you know what they are. When I got home with a full sack I'd ram them into a big jar, salt them and eat them with the salt."

Many people spoke of "Badayevsky" or "sweet" soil. It was sold at the market on a level with other foodstuffs. The quality (and price) of "Badayevsky food" depended on the layer of earth—upper or lower—it came from. *Valentina Moroz* (a librarian) still remembers what it tasted like:

"I still remember this detail: when they bombed the Badayevsky Stores we dashed there—or rather dragged ourselves there. And there was that earth. The taste of the earth remained with me, and today I still have the impression that I was eating fatty cottage cheese. That was black earth. Could it really have been soaked through with fat?"

"Did you taste the sweetness?"

"Not really sweetness, but something fatty—perhaps there was butter there, too. The impression was that the earth was very tasty, really fatty! "

"How did you prepare that earth for eating?"

"We didn't do anything to it. We simply swallowed little pieces and washed it down with boiled water."

You can find anything in the list of things that were eaten during the blockade, from the hempseed in bird food, to the canaries themselves, and blackbirds, and parrots. People scraped flour paste off the wallpaper, extracted it from bookbindings, boiled down driving belts, ate cats, dogs, crows, used all kinds of industrial oil or grease, used drying oil, medicines, spices, vaseline, glycerine, all kinds of waste from vegetable raw material. The list is long, surprising by the ingenuity, even the cunning resourcefulness with which people investigated the edibility of everything around them. For example, one woman cut up, boiled, and then ate a coat made from gopher fur (from the story told by *M. G. Stepanchuk*).

There are nationalities for whom it is customary to regard as food, say, dogs, or snakes, or frogs. It was not at all easy for Leningraders to over-

come their prejudices and their upbringing, and many of them found it beyond them.

And even in the literal sense ... "they ate earth"...

Alexandra Arsenyeva, the author of published reminiscences about the Young Communist anti-airforce defence regiment, told us: "I was on my way to a seminar at the district committee offices and was caught in the bombing beneath the archway. I was hit in the back, true, it didn't fracture my spine, but there were huge bruises, and I couldn't move. They carried me unconscious into some trade school or other, to the ground floor. As I lay there, feeling that I'd never get back to life again, would never get up, I was looking at the boys, emaciated, and carrying gas mask cases. In those cases there was earth—they were selling it, exchanging earth for bread! One boy came up to me and asked: 'Auntie, you're not eating bread?' (and I was no longer eating bread, as I had diarrhoea with blood in it, and I wasn't eating anything at all). 'Exchange it for earth. It's very tasty!' 'How,' I asked, 'is it possible to eat earth?'"

"Was it sweet earth from the Badayevsky Stores?"

"It was peat, and not even sweet, but simply peat, because peat is considered nourishing earth. So it was earth for bread. For a piece of bread he would give you two mugs of earth. I took the earth just to try it, and gave them the bread. I gave them my ration cards, too. The boys were honest, and they regularly brought me my bread."

In this atmosphere the word "bread" acquired, or rather recovered, its special symbolic meaning—our daily bread. Bread as the symbol of life, bread as the earth's finest bounty, the source of man's strength.

Taisia Meshchankina, another blockade survivor, spoke of bread as if she were composing a new prayer.

"Listen to me. Now, when I get up I take a piece of bread and say: Remember, O Lord, all who died of hunger, who did not live to eat their fill of bread."

"I told myself that if some day I had bread left over I would consider myself a very wealthy person."

"That's what I start the morning with, just that. I'm not making it up. I drink two cups of strong tea, and that is riches."

"When a person was dying and you went up to him, he didn't ask for anything—butter, or an orange—he didn't ask for anything. He'd only say to you: give me a crumb of bread! And then he died..."

"I remained alive, I don't know why such a person as I should have lived. I'm not very literate."

"I had a difficult childhood, for my father and mother both died before the Revolution. Well, so why was I spared? Perhaps in order to relate some interesting story of what happened here" (Block 2, 9 Sofia Kovalevskaya St.).

Mass starvation means people dying quietly. A person would be sitting down and imperceptibly drift off, or would be walking along, would stop, and his knees would buckle... Many people witnessed and remarked upon the appalling "quietness" of deaths from starvation.

"I was walking home from work (at the corner of Gaaz Prospekt and Ogorodnikov St.) and there was a woman walking along. 'My dear, for



Alexandra Arsenyeva, 1940.

goodness sake help me! ' I was passing by, saying: 'How can I help you?' 'Well, just get me to that fence.' I got her there. She stood there a while, then her knees gave way and she slid to the ground. I asked: 'How can I help you?' I looked and saw that her eyes were closed. She was dead! '' (Yelena Nikitina, 26 Stachek Prospekt).

There was more on the same subject from *Lyudmila Mandrykina* (137 Nevsky Prospekt).

"...Well, what else is there to tell you? In the military archives, where I was working, there was always a militiaman sitting. And what splendid young men they were, those militiamen were wonderful, all of them young. They were men who had been called up for the war and had remained here in the militia. They fed them very badly in the militia, as they did in the AA units. I oft used to chat with them, well, we just talked about how all this would pass and then what would follow. We tried not to speak about food. And suddenly, as you were looking at someone you'd notice that his eyes were glassy. Now I know what that means..."

"In the middle of a conversation?"

"Yes, right as we were talking. He'd be sitting there, would seem to shrink and would say: 'Oh! I don't feel so well! ' 'You sit there for a bit! No one feels very well..."

"That's how two people died before my very eyes. After that he began to speak more and more slowly, slower and slower..."

"People died like that. They died like that in the street, too. As they walked along, someone would sink onto the pavement. At first people would go up to them, and then they would simply go round them, and



often a man would freeze.”

Such stories were heard again and again, with endless variations—about the quiet, imperceptible passage across the border of hunger—and a few of them take on a terrible symbolic meaning.

“Then he suddenly turned to me and said: ‘Maria Andreyevna! Come and sit down by me. I’ll give you my Party card. Sit for a little with me.’ So I sat down next to him. I asked: ‘Where’s your family?’ ‘Evacuated. I don’t know where, they don’t write and tell me anything.’ (Well, it would have made little difference, anyway. The letters would hardly have reached him, whether they wrote or not.) And, you know, he flung his arms round my neck, wanted to kiss me or something. Then he died! I couldn’t disentangle myself anyhow, couldn’t do anything. You imagine how a dead person’s fingers clutch at you! I couldn’t get away from there, couldn’t do anything. Zhenya Savich and someone else came along. They couldn’t do anything, either. Well, it took quite an effort to disentangle my head from him...” (from the story of *Maria Syutkina*, former Party organiser of a shop at the Kirov Works).

And still, during this time, people had to go to their factories, to keep working, although it was sometimes simply beyond the strength of a Leningrader to walk along the street.

“I remember very well the way people walked. I have never seen or heard of a person walking the way people did during the blockade: as if against the wind, you understand, his whole body bent forward to save himself from falling, setting his feet down so heavily in front of him! Nearly everybody walked that way. I don’t know why I’ve remembered that way of walking.”

“Did you find yourself walking like that? Or didn’t you pay attention to it?”

“Perhaps I walked that way, too. I don’t remember now. I just remember that walk. But was it the way I walked, or was it simply those around me? I can’t remember. I think everyone walked like that...” (*Alexandra Grigorovich*).

“You know, that left an impression on me, too. You’d go on with that shuffling gait, hardly able to put one foot before the other. And the people around would be walking in the same way, and someone would have a briefcase tied to him somewhere, because it was difficult for him to carry it in his hands, so he’d tied it there round his neck. And it was all like a slow motion film.

“I was struck by two things. There was this scene—a man was reading advertisements in the street. and he had a rope in his hand for pulling along a board with a corpse on it. And there was another time, when I was coming home from one of the most out-of-the-way places—from the Institute of Experimental Medicine, and I was walking along Pavlov Street late in the evening. A group of people were walking behind me. I wasn’t even taking any notice of them until I heard laughter, and then I started, and turned round. Something quite incredible was going on—it seemed there were some girls there, and one of them had laughed at something...” (*Vladimir Alexandrov*).

Hunger not only brought about physical changes in people—it altered

character and habits, and as far as some people were concerned it transformed their entire mentality.

Zinaida Ignatovich (35 Sredni Prospekt): "How did I succeed in supporting my colleagues? Before the war, our laboratory was working on food poisoning caused by various bacteria. In order to cultivate bacteria a special medium has to be prepared. This has a meat broth base. The Leningrad slaughter-house used to make this medium for us, a concentrated broth, for which unborn calves were needed. What was it? When the cows were killed and an embryo found in the womb, a Libich extract was made from it and then dried. We had a large stock of this. It saved many of our staff. When the hungry period started, as deputy head of the scientific department I used to extract a glassful when I arrived at work, then all the staff would sit round and I would give them each a tablespoonful of meat extract. It could be eaten plain. Here I'd like to recall something that still makes me feel terrible. I'm thinking of one of our staff, a very cultured person. He was a big, healthy man. But he very quickly succumbed. When I was giving out the meat extract in the mornings, he was always the first at the table. And how feverish his eyes were as they followed that spoon around! You felt all his thoughts were concentrated on it. It was very difficult to believe that this was the same man, so fastidious, such a clever, wonderful man!

"When they began to open the so-called inpatients' clinics we managed to get him into one of them. But then the doctors didn't know that you couldn't give a person a lot of food all at once after starvation. They gave him 200 grammes of butter and half a loaf of bread. He ate it all in one go, and died in the night."

"Surely the doctors must have known about that! "

"At the beginning they didn't. Later they learned that you had to bring a person out of a starved condition bit by bit."

There were other people in that little laboratory who lived differently in these months and died from other causes.

"We had a doorman called Soloviev, a simple soul. He could not even read or write very well. His sons had gone to the front, and only his daughter remained with him (his wife had died before the war). Then his son-in-law was called up, and the daughter went off with him to the front. Soloviev was on duty at the door, you see, for people used to bring specimens to be analyzed to our laboratory at any time of the day or night, because it was concerned with food. And he would sit in the lobby, which was unheated and cold. He may have been illiterate, but he had his convictions, and to the fainthearted he would say: 'You surely don't think we're going to give up Leningrad? We'll never give it up.' And he himself would draw his belt up tighter and tighter, and get thinner and thinner. He would receive the specimens, carry out his duties and put heart into everybody. 'Just wait a bit!' he'd say. 'Leningrad will hold out. And we'll live.' Then one day the staff came to work and wondered where Soloviev was. But he had died at his post, on the stool he had occupied in life. So he died, firmly believing in victory, with faith that Leningrad would be freed without fail."

Zinaida Ignatovich was not drawing a comparison. Neither in word nor in tone of voice did she blacken the memory of the first of the two men.



People understood that hunger could gain mastery over man. Every one of them had felt its crushing force and each was secretly afraid that while today he had held out, tomorrow willpower might be lacking and something would crack, would break...

"I went right through the blockade. The worst thing of all was hunger," affirmed *Lydia Usova*, who was a worker at the time. "That's the most terrible thing of all. Our factory was under fire every day, but we didn't go to the shelter—we completely lost our fear of that. The first thing we used to do was to grab a piece of bread each and stuff it in our mouths—god forbid that you might be killed and the bread remain there! You understand? That was the kind of mentality at the time. And then you were seized with horror. You'd eaten it all, but the bombing was over! That was in 1942. That was the worst year of all! I remember when my mother was dying and I gave her pieces of sugar, she kept saying: 'You're a good girl, a kind girl.' But I couldn't share anything with my sister. She was in hospital, and I'd be taking her something, when the firing would start, and I'd eat it all up, I just couldn't get it to her. At that point I was already in such a state that I could think of nothing but food. You understand? It was quite terrible."

Lydia Usova had no mercy on herself. She was one of those people in whom through this self-condemnation you could see the living conscience, which could not be appeased by any sly indulgences of the time.

In her story about her work she returned time and time again to reminiscences of hunger, to the feeling that was evidently ineffaceable.

"I was working at the Fifth Factory-Transport School," she said. "Then we were moved to the Krasnaya Zarya Factory, which was a very long

walk. There we were kept busy clearing up. It was very hard when we were shovelling snow. I fell down, and they took me to the reception department of the hospital. When I came to, I heard someone saying that here was a case of complete decline in cardiac activity. That was probably when they gave me an injection. When I opened my eyes they gave me some boiled water and sent me back to work again. Was I hard to kill! It may have been important that they sent me back to work again, because people who took to their beds did not get up again."

"But did you know then that people who lay down didn't get up again? Or was that later on?"

"No, we didn't understand anything then. I'll say this: my thoughts were concerned entirely with food. It was real madness. In 1942 I could no longer bring the ration back home from the shop. If there were raw peas I'd gulp them down in the street... So winter 1942 came and went, and spring was making its appearance. I looked ghastly, and was very bloated. I was unbelievably thin. With my height I weighed 42 kilogrammes (I weighed myself in hospital—it was interesting). My legs were like sticks, and I had this bloated face with chinks for eyes. I was a dreadful sight. Here they began to put us through a course of intensive feeding. This was organised absolutely correctly. They fed us small portions of food four times a day, they gave us full-value food, but still we wept. It seemed to us that we were being robbed, that they'd taken our ration cards and were giving us very little in return. That was, of course, a psychosis, no doubt about that. The canteen was on the corner of Nevsky and Vladimirsky Prospekts, where the Moskva restaurant is today. It was simply awful. You'd turn up and they'd give you a tiny dish of porridge. You were dying for more. And I remember sitting in a public garden and watching the sparrows hopping about, and I found I had purely feline instincts—if only I could catch one of those sparrows and make soup of it!

"...There was the intensified feeding, and there were the weeds we began to eat. In the mornings I would get up at about four o'clock and go to any refuse dump to pick nettles. If I managed to collect a handkerchiefful it was wonderful! Then I'd go on to the Tavrichesky Garden, where the weeds were waist-high. I used to pick those according to their taste. There was goosefoot there, of course. And I was surprised, wondering why people ever ate radishes when they could eat goosefoot, which had a far better flavour. We used it to supplement the porridge ration we were given."

We met the *Vasiliyevs*, a worker's family—*Nikander* and *Zoya* (105 Prospekt Metallistov), and recorded their stories. The husband was a foreman at the Metal Works, and his wife stayed at home and looked after the children. This is what she had to say on that score:

"I had a paper authorising evacuation, to the Omsk region, where our people from the factory were evacuated. Many of the women had gone, and I was also preparing to go, for I thought there was nothing I could do here since I had to take care of the children. But people asked me: 'How can you go there? Who have you got there?' And I'd say: 'Well, I haven't got anybody there, my family's in Leningrad.' Then I thought it

over for a long, long time. Where would I go with two small children? No one there was expecting us. So I decided I wasn't going, and that was that! I unpacked everything and stayed in Leningrad. Well, the shelling had just started then, and we hadn't suffered from hunger at that stage. Then the shelling affected us so badly that we thought starving would be better if only it meant freedom from those terrible bombardments—we were in an industrial district, and there were factories all around. Furthermore, it was at night that they bombed and shelled us, and launched rocket flares which seemed to be attached to a sort of umbrella. Then the food supply couldn't be guaranteed. My daughter used to play with the ration cards for a long time, cutting off the coupons."

"That was after the war, when you didn't need them?"

"Yes, we still had unredeemed coupons. I used to go out at 3 a.m. and queue up for food. I'd have my warm coat on, and I'd tie some string or a sash or something round my waist so it fitted tighter, because we were already skin and bone. My husband went off to work every morning, to the factory. And I would leave the girl, the elder one, with the young baby. She would move into our bed, and seeing that the child was wet, she'd have to change her. I would be queueing up for food. Sometimes it would be for nothing—you wouldn't get anything, you'd come home empty-handed. The only thing that helped us to survive was the allotments. Where Revolution Highway is now, a built-up area, it was all fields then. They gave us two hundredths of a hectare, and sent us seed: carrots, swedes and turnips. The packets were khaki-coloured, small and firmly sealed. Later on, when we started digging these allotments, they gave us some tops—pieces of potato—they gave out one and a half kilogrammes each at the factory, I remember now."

"Potato eyes?"

"Yes, the eyes or tops. So we got three kilogrammes of those, and we planted them. The potatoes were marvellous—red and crumbly. We were delighted with these vegetables. We had a lot of cabbages, too. Early on, when I was getting ready for evacuation I was given some dry milk for the journey. Well, at first I gave some of it to the baby as an extra. And we ourselves were getting our rations, so we had enough to eat. But later, when hunger really set in, the baby became very thin. Yet she was rosy complexioned. My husband's mother, she, too, kept her rosy complexion—even when she was eighty, it was her skin type... Once the bakery didn't produce any bread for several days. But they let us have flour. I used the flour to replace bread and made a kind of mash—boiling up two spoonfuls of flour in a saucepan of water, and adding salt. And that hot flour, as you might call it, we gulped down greedily. I boiled up a thicker mixture for my baby daughter. In the night I heard her retching. My elder daughter and I slept on the stove. My husband slept on tables: there were two or three moved together. For the little one we brought chairs into the kitchen and she lay there, too. I jumped out of bed and lit the wick lamp. I looked at the baby and saw she was vomiting and had diarrhoea. I took her to the children's clinic and said: 'I've nothing to feed the baby with, if you could only prescribe something!' The doctor said: 'We haven't anything, we don't give out food.' Then I said: 'Look at



her! ' She replied: 'She's all right, she's a rosy baby! ' 'Don't look at her face, she's got arms and legs like string! ' I told her. 'You mustn't inwrap her, it's cold here. We haven't anything.' So they wouldn't help. Well, of course, she died quite soon, because there was nothing whatever to feed her with, no cereal, no oil, we weren't getting anything at that time.

"And when the bombs started falling, you know, when the bomb would fall, the houses would just rock. I didn't go to the shelter even once. I thought if I'm to be killed, it doesn't matter where it happens—in the shelter or here. Sometimes you'd get a bag ready, I'd keep something there, water for drinking, napkins for the baby. We usually sat in the entrance hall—I and a woman with a baby from another room. We'd huddle there with our bags, sitting in the middle to avoid being hit by glass.

When I was taken to the hospital my elder daughter was left at home. I was in hospital for over a month. My husband would give her something to eat in the mornings and then go off to the factory. At dinner-time he would dash home and warm up something—it was quite near. Then eventually I came back home. That was when we got the allotment. He took me there and said: come on, start digging. I just stood there. The wind was powerful, and blew so hard that I'd fall down. There was nothing to sit on, just damp earth all around..."

At first one saw only the bodies of those killed by bombs and shells. Then the corpses of those who had died from starvation began to appear. For a time it was not simply that they weren't noticed—people were afraid to accept to the full what this meant, what was advancing upon the city.

Galina Petrova was studying at a medical institute, and she was one of the first to see those who had fallen victim to alimentary dystrophy. But after seeing a corpse in the street, this young woman, who would graduate as a doctor in a matter of days, was as frightened as a girl—not of a dead human being, but of mass starvation, which she recognised of a sudden.

People already saw it happening. But they were reluctant to see what they did not want to accept.

Ivan Koroikov, an artist, has clear memories of this futile cunning of the human mind, for which the truth was too terrible.

"I was queueing up at the baker's for bread. A dim lamp was burning there, and they were allowing a soggy piece of bread on each card. I felt myself come up against something, and I stepped over it. I had no realisation that it was a human being. I wondered who had thrown the sack down there. I could not understand at all what was happening. I stepped over it, and others did the same. It was only as I was going out of the shop that it hit me that we had been walking over a person who had fallen there! We had been stepping over him, and no one had acknowledged that fact. What a fearful state we were in! "

"Was there any guard for the assistants in the bakery?"

"That I don't know. There may have been some secret outposts. Somehow no one thought about that, and I didn't have any particular ideas on the subject. And there are some incomprehensible things—the whole time

I kept finding myself under misapprehensions. For instance, my wife Lina had a sister called Maria. Her husband and son died the same night from hunger. Somehow or other people managed to let me know, and I went to them. She had another son, who was serving as a political instructor in an army hospital because he had only one eye—he had lost the other one in the war. Someone, somewhere, had made him two coffins (that was a rare thing at the time), and provided a horse. We put the two coffins on some rustic sleigh, tied them securely, sat on them and set off for the cemetery. I remember that place in Malaya Posadskaya as if it were today. There was a good solid house on the corner. That was the one they lived in, No. 10, Malaya Posadskaya. It had nice balconies. I can picture, as if it were happening now, Maria standing downstairs and the two of us going off sitting on those coffins.

“Well, so off we went, heading for the Serafimovsky Cemetery. Along the road everyone was pulling a sledge. Someone asked us whether we would hitch his behind our sleigh and let him sit with us. First there was one sitting with us, then another. Later, we had three sledges attached behind, and another three people sitting with us. We arrived at the cemetery. There was an excavator at work there, digging trenches. At the same time I saw a vehicle moving in the distance. Somehow it didn’t dawn on me what was happening. It was only later I realised that they were bringing dead people to the trenches and burying them, and the lorries kept coming and coming, for they were gathering up people, all those who lay dead in the streets all over the city, bringing them here, and burying them. At the time I either didn’t understand what was going on or was set against acknowledging it—I didn’t accept what was happening.”

Dmitry Smirnov was still a teenager at the time. But he clearly remembers everything that took place, and also his own feelings.

“There weren’t bodies lying in the streets in December, or in January, at the beginning of the month. They began to appear at the end of January. In January they were still taking them to the cemetery in coffins. Afterwards it was without coffins, and later on, after a while, I recall, the corpses lay in the streets covered up, wrapped in something or other.”

“In sheets?”

“Yes... There were a lot of dead people being taken through the streets. What does a lot mean? If you came across three, four or five corpses as you went from one end of Bolshoi Prospekt to the other... On sledges, most of them were on sledges, because there was already snow. Some people transported them on two sledges lashed together. More often than not, it was women who were pulling the sledges. My mother, too, nearly died. She worked at a chemist’s, and that was what saved her. She began to suffer from furunculosis, and she had terrible boils on her neck. Then—and some people don’t believe this—pine needles helped her a lot. We used to drink pine infusion. I was badly shaken when one day I saw (I still remember it as if it were yesterday) somewhere in Bolshoi Prospekt—there was either a trade school, or a factory training school, I’m not sure what it was—perhaps there was a depot there where they took the bodies. But one spring day (spring, because there was no longer any snow), a lorry was approaching, and it was carrying corpses. It was so terrible...

The entrance to the Hermitage Museum from Khalturin Street.



Even now I can visualise the spot where that lorry passed, and how it passed by. All I had to do was to look the other way. But now I couldn't turn away... Furthermore, it was one of those pre-war three-tonners, you know, with a very big cab. You haven't seen them? But the thought that struck me was why, oh why, hadn't they left the city? They could, as you might say, have left on foot. At any rate there was the transport conveyer organised along the Road of Life. People went out, food came back, people out, food in."

This man very accurately expressed the merciless power of the blockade memory: "*All I had to do was to look the other way. But now I couldn't turn away.*"

This is how people saw one another when they gathered together:

"The University wasn't being heated, the water wasn't turned off, the water in the central heating system had frozen and the pipes had burst, and once that happened the water kept flowing. By the end of November our lectures had become combinations of ice caves and glaciers, with water frozen in its course down the walls and hanging from the ceiling in the form of icicles."

"Why from the ceiling?"

"Simply because we had this steam heating. I think that if people had been more experienced this could have been foreseen and the water turned off. Perhaps whoever might have turned it off had died or gone away. Whatever it was, the fact remained that from the ceiling there were icicles hanging and down below there were stalactites, as in a cave. This created a most cheerless atmosphere. The students sat in their coats, putting on as many coats as they could. There was still electricity, it was even possible to go on studying, but altogether it was not easy, altogether it was very difficult. There were fewer and fewer students, and often one of the lecturers would fail to turn up. While I wouldn't say that studies were actually stopped completely, the course of study had been disrupted. The most frightening thing of all was the fearful appearance of the faces of the students, staff and acquaintances. How does the face of a person who looked as we did change? There are no words to describe it. It might be possible to paint it. It's simply horrifying. It's not so horrifying when a person is just ill and is dying, or if he's dying in an unusual manner (perhaps that's a cynical way to put it), has been hit by a shell or a bomb. But what happened as a result of hunger, that was particularly awful, the way a person's face changed then. His appearance, his face changed, a man became an animated corpse and, as we know, a corpse is a grim spectacle. Those yellow faces were most horrifying, and with the noticeably fixed stare, too. It's not the same as when a person's arm or leg hurts and he's in agony over that. Here the entire organism was disordered, and often there were disturbances of the mental processes. The yellow face, the staring eyes, the noticeable loss of voice—you couldn't tell from the voice whether it was a man or a woman speaking, it was a quavering voice—the voice of a person who had lost age and sex..." (*Ye. Lapin*).

The torments were appalling, but there were sometimes joys which are remembered forever.

None of the blockade survivors think to themselves: we accomplished a great feat, displayed heroism. No. But over the decades those painful years have become a kind of justification of a life, a sign of civilian valour, a measure of participation in Victory. It is a feeling akin to that of a soldier of the Great Patriotic War. Moreover, the blockade survivor has a knowledge of man's infinite potential, including his own potential, a respect for himself. Every contact with the past, of course, stirs up much that is contradictory—each one has his own: horror and sorrow, disgrace and beauty, revulsion and love—all these were intermingled so inextricably that it is beyond one's powers to isolate one particular emotion.

Before we went to see him *Pavel Gubchevsky*, a researcher at the Hermitage, preparing his thoughts for the talk, was pondering the question: what had the blockade meant to him? Then he acknowledged to us: "It was hard for me to find an answer. The shelling? But the shells were everywhere. The bombs? It was the same with those. Hunger? Well, of course, that wasn't quite the same as everywhere else, it took a more terrible form, but then nowhere did people have such a sweet life at that time. Death? Deaths were everywhere, and some terrible ones at that! Well, perhaps not in so concentrated a form. And it seemed to me when I wanted to sum up things for myself (I've never spoken anywhere about this, and have never even discussed it with myself) that the blockade is above all people. But people are all different. And that is evidently why there exist very different perceptions of this concept, 'the blockade', depending on the individuality of the person concerned.

"This is the surprising thing—after that it occurred to me that never in my life, either before the blockade or after it, have I had such a definite, clearly defined aim in life. That aim even seemed not far from reach. The fact that it kept receding, for various reasons, was another matter. Whatever was going on within me, inside the human being? I am no sort of leader or anybody in particular, I'm an ordinary, uncomplicated man, and I had a precise and definite aim, whereas before that (and right now) my aim had always been vague and shadowy. But then it was definite. That's what the blockade (and of course, all the other things of which many others have spoken to you about) means to me. People acquired an amazing integrity. How can I explain it to you? Probably it will sound rather peculiar: I felt as though something within me had been unleashed, set free. There were thousands of 'mustn'ts' and 'can'ts', of course. Naturally, I couldn't break out of the blockade, or go off to a Black Sea resort. And, of course, I couldn't eat delicious things. Furthermore, I carried out a multitude of duties of various kinds—both in my official capacity (I was in charge of the guard of large buildings), and as a citizen. Of course I received orders and instructions, I knew what I had to do, what I was obliged to do, but that 'obliged' was freedom for me. Probably what I'm saying sounds crazy, but I want to be frank with you. That was how it was, and that was the blockade, too."

"You say that the whole time you were aware of an aim, you saw it before you..."

"I used to sit in my room and wait for the next bout of shelling. These wore you out all the more because they lasted so long—you understand?

And I would think what a fool I had been, living the way I used to live! I had hardly ever gone to concerts at the Philharmonic, rarely went to the Kirov Theatre. And what a lot has to be done to make that possible! The theatre has to be warm, and lit up, over a hundred musicians have to assemble, for them to have been fed properly, the ballet dancers have to come together, the public has to turn up, and there are a thousand other 'has' and 'have to's'! I didn't appreciate all that, didn't notice it. At that time I didn't think as soon as the blockade is over, I'll eat millet porridge by the saucepanful (you've no doubt heard that, probably some people have already spoken of this). That wasn't how it happened with me. During the blockade, there arose within me the aim to find something bigger in life, and if I can use a highflown phrase, something spiritual, something I had attached little value to, and had not been able to accomplish."

In the halls of the Hermitage, always overflowing with visitors, you can hear the muffled voices of the guides speaking in many languages. The paintings, the sculptures, the patterned parquet flooring—all these have the air of having been there forever, that nothing could ever have been otherwise in this renowned source of beauty for the sake of which people came from all over the world... But in the staff room museum workers will tell you how they lived here during the war.

Alexandra Amosova:

"Here, beneath the library building, a morgue was set up. From time to time bodies were taken away from it. But I remember a very distressing occasion. It was at the end of March. Iosif Orbeli, the director of the Hermitage, left, I think, on March 30. There were very few of us left here. There were a few from the workers' team, too. When Orbeli was here funeral documents were still being filled in. The bodies of some of our engineers, including some of our senior researchers were taken away. And there was our Professor Kubbe and several more well-known people."

Olga Mikhailova:

"I'd like to add a little more about that episode, because it left a particularly deep and powerful impression on me. I shall never forget it."

"You knew these people?"

"Yes... It was a big lorry, and all the dead on it were people well known to us, altogether close to us, for they were our colleagues, lying there stiff and cold... Well, you know, that's something you can never forget all your life.

"But perhaps it's not something you should write about or I speak about?"

"...not write or speak about"—that person was sparing us, protecting us. From a burden she herself would bear throughout her life. She herself can't get away from it—"can't turn away".

"You can't tell fantasy from truth here, for that truth was so fantastic that it's impossible to distinguish truth from untruth, fantasy from lie.

You understand? But anyway, that's the way it is, and it's impossible to relate everything thoroughly."

"Why?"

"Only a person who's been through it all can understand it."

That last remark represents a quite widespread misapprehension. No special powers are necessary here, people can comprehend and imagine anything at all. Any deprivations and burdens of blockade life. For this it is only necessary to relate everything just as it was, not playing it down, not exaggerating in either direction. The error is due to the fact that those who went through the blockade cannot themselves conceive how it could all have happened to them, they themselves can't believe it. The human memory is treacherous. What to speak of, what to recount out of what happened, how to depict it, is another matter, genuinely a very, very difficult one.

Although it is not quite apt, not on the subject, it is impossible to avoid, to leave till later, an incident in Pavel Gubchevsky's story. As time went on, you found yourself thinking about it more and more.

"There were 32 shell hits. The amount of damage they did varied. One that fell in the Coat-of-Arms Hall dropped about two metres from the Small Throne Room. By what laws of ballistics it happened, I don't know, but fragments burst through into this room, the Small Throne Room. In the Coat-of-Arms Hall there was a hole in the floor, down into the Rastrelli Gallery, and that was all. But the Small Throne Room was riddled with shrapnel. The chandelier was broken, and it hasn't been possible to restore it—it was very fragile bronze... Apart from that, the shrapnel literally riddled the walls and ceiling. While there was nothing on the walls (the Lyons velvet embroidered with silver, good velvet, very much of its period, had been wound onto rollers and taken away, had been evacuated), there had been a wall-painting that was extraordinarily difficult to restore. It had looked terrible after the shelling. As for the staircase by which one enters the museum—the Embassy, the Jordan, the Main Staircase, whichever you like to call it—it was also in a bad way. A shell had made a hole in the roof over the staircase. Whereas the plafond had only undergone a change of colour, had gone black, because of three years of constantly changing temperatures, all the painting adjoining the plafond and that over the entire ceiling had been done upon iron (iron ceilings were installed after the fire of 1837), and this iron had rusted through, had not held up, was deteriorating. So these murals that you can see now were scattered about in flakes just a little bigger than this little book. People, members of our staff, were treading on those flakes. It was, of course, a wretched sight."

"And were all the paintings taken away?"

"Altogether 1,117,000 items were taken away from the Hermitage, but now we're getting into statistics, and that's boring and uninteresting. There were scarcely any paintings in the halls. But Angelico's fresco couldn't be evacuated, nor could the huge work of Giulio Romano's—even on a roller it would have crumbled—nor, too, could the painting on Raphael's loggia. Also left behind were things that could look after themselves, for example, the frames."

"What did the halls look like?"

"Just empty frames! It was a wise instruction of Orbeli's that all the frames were to be left in their places. Because of that the Hermitage was able to get its exhibition back in place within eighteen days after the return of the paintings from evacuation! During the war they hung like that, empty eye-sockets of frames, around which I conducted several excursions."

"To see empty frames?"

"To see empty frames."

"Which year was that?"

"It was in spring, somewhere about the end of April 1942. The lads I took around were undergoing military training. The cadets helped us to move some magnificent and valuable furniture, for water was coming through from above. The thing was that we could not evacuate this furniture. It had been taken to the stables (on the ground floor, beneath the hanging garden). In 1942 water started coming through, and the furniture, a wonderful collection—medieval, French classicism—was all being soaked. It had to be saved, to be put somewhere else, but how, and who was going to do it? These forty elderly women on my staff, of whom at least a third were in hospitals or clinics? And the others were either suffering from industrial injury or illness, or were over seventy. Then they brought the military students from Siberia. They were more or less strong, and they were here to take a course for junior lieutenants. They dragged the furniture to a comparatively safe hall, and it stood there until the end of the war. I had to thank them somehow. I lined them up in the hall (over there between those columns), and said a few words to them by way of thanks. Afterwards I took those lads from Siberia and showed them round the Hermitage, round the empty frames. It was the oddest excursion in my life. Even empty frames, it turned out, can make an impression."

...One can imagine what it was like—the Hermitage walls, frozen through during the winter so that they were covered with rime from top to bottom, the footsteps echoing hollowly through the empty halls... The rectangular frames, gilded, oak, some small, some enormous, some plain, others with fanciful carving, with ornamentation, frames which had hitherto remained unnoticed but had now become something in their own right. Some had pretensions to filling their own emptiness, others emphasised the void they embraced. Those frames—of Poussins, Rembrandts, Cranachs, of Dutch, French and Italian masters—were somehow designations of the actual paintings to Gubchevsky. To him the pictures were inseparable from the frames, in which he could see the paintings in all their detail, nuances of light and colour—figures, faces, folds of garments, individual brush strokes. The absence of pictures made them even more graphic to him. The power of his imagination, the keenness of his memory and his inner vision grew, compensating for the emptiness. He atoned for the lack of paintings with words, gestures, intonation, all the weapons of his imagination, language and knowledge. Intently, with keen interest, people stared into the space enclosed by the frame. Words were transformed into lines, colour, and brush strokes, the play of shade and air. People think that painting cannot be conveyed in words. That is so, but during that blockade life words recreated paintings, brought them back, bringing

into play all the colours, and with such brilliance, with such graphic power, that they were forever etched in the memory. Never again did Pavel Gubchevsky succeed in conducting a tour on which people saw and felt so much.

The enemy was waiting for Leningrad to "devour itself", and was forever reminding the city—with shells, bombs and leaflets—that it was time, he was waiting.

Zoya Bernikovich speaks of the gloating, sadistic reminders given by the nazis:

"And when I was in the trenches, do you know what kind of doggerel we got there? The Germans dropped leaflets saying such things as 'Finish your bread, you'll soon be dead!' and 'Eat all your feed and Leningrad cede!' We just shouted back: 'We will not cede our city!'"

In the city death became part of the daily round. Soviet soldiers and sailors, themselves half-starved, fought, shed their blood on that scrap of land on the Neva, doing their best to break through to the railway which could have fully ensured supplies for Leningrad, restored strength to its starving, exhausted people, saved their lives. The ice road opened across Lake Ladoga at the end of November, in December began to bring some foodstuffs, some hope. Once again there was an opportunity to evacuate Leningraders, although it was a very difficult route for the exhausted and sick, and many died on the way to life and even after they had got through the ring of the blockade. Right until summer 1942 death was snatching people, even when things had got better—many were too far gone with dystrophy.

"...Relatives used to come to the registry office to notify deaths of people from hunger and cold," *Yelena Nikitina*, a teacher, recalls. "That was in December 1941 and January 1942. In my memory, in my life, that was the most terrible time of the whole blockade. The war, the shelling and the bombing were bad enough. All that was very terrible, horrible. But it wasn't as horrible as starvation, because there was absolutely nothing to eat. We who were engaged on defence works still used to dig up potatoes left in the ground, we fed on cabbage leaves, and we got horse-meat sometimes (a horse crippled by shelling would immediately be cut up and we would get that meat). But in the city there was absolutely nothing to eat, for all reserves in people's homes had run out, were already exhausted; at the beginning there had been some rusks, there were such things as starch. I had had several kilograms of starch. But it had all gone. So you'd go to work, and you had great trouble putting one foot in front of the other. The trams had stopped running, there was no water, no light. People were in a terrible state. They couldn't walk, they couldn't even remove a bucket of slops... Well, so I was working at the registry office in December 1941 and January 1942."

"Can you tell us some more about how the registration was done?"

"Well, people stood in queues. A woman would come and say that her mother had died, and so had an old woman, one of the neighbours. She'd hand over their passports, their documents. I'd quickly enter the particu-

lars, I was in a hurry. The ink would freeze. There was no heating in the building of the Kirov district Soviet. Later on they gave us a stove, but I don't remember it warming us up. The ink would freeze. You'd arrive at work and try to warm it with your hands, till you thought it had warmed up. I remember there were long queues to register the dead."

"How many did you register in a day?"

"They stood in queues. I wasn't the only one working there, there were three of us. In one day I'd register up to 150 people. I worked there through December and January. People stood there exhausted, you felt sorry for them. So we tried to let them go as soon as possible. Incidentally, none of them were crying. At that time I used to go home after work. My brother's family were also living with me then (my brother was at the front): there was his wife and child. The child was three—he's recently got a degree in science, that child. I'd come home and find him lying on the bed all the time—cold and hunger had drained him of the strength to think of anything else. He was dressed in a shirt with long sleeves, which was warmer. He'd suddenly stand up in this shirt and ask: 'Auntie Lena, have you brought me just a little piece of bread?' I'd reply: 'No, I haven't brought any.' Because I didn't have any for myself, either. We received on our ration cards precisely what was due to us. I used to collect all the family's cards, and go off to the baker's and get the bread. I always used to go on my own, for the others were in no condition to walk, they were older than me. And there was the child asking each time I came in: 'Have you brought me anything?' It was pitiful to look at him. Now you make the comparison with the childhood of our children today, when you give them an apple and they don't want to eat it. And then there wasn't even bread! "

"What about your brother?"

"He was at the front, but he came back. True, he was seriously wounded, but never mind. He's still alive today... 'Have you brought me just a little piece of bread?' the boy would ask. He was so skinny, all bones. And in that white shirt he really looked like death! I'd come home from work, knock at the door (the bells weren't working) and each time I'd think, well, now someone will open the door and say that one of your family's died, for death was always close by, was everywhere. Opposite us, across the landing, lived the Nikolskys, actors from the Kirov Theatre. I came home from work one evening and they were just bringing out the man's body. Then there were no coffins, and they would simply wrap the corpse up in a sheet and carry it out into the frost... Afterwards, in February, or maybe at the end of January, I was transferred to the district Party offices to work for the evacuation commission. I was the technical secretary. I gave out the documents, and signed authorisations for people to go across to the other side by the Road of Life, across Lake Ladoga."

"To Kobona?"

"Yes. And I issued ration cards or food coupons to them. So they'd get food right there on the bank of Lake Ladoga... We were still in the Kirov district Soviet offices, but in a different room, number 260. They had a stove there, which heated the place a little. But there was no firewood, so we burnt the furniture that was left there—old chairs, surplus desks,

furniture that did not seem to be up to much. Later on we went out to get firewood ourselves—to demolish wooden houses. I did it in the January 9 Gardens, right nearby, I remember. It was for heating the district offices and in general for the local population, so that people could have a little bit of warmth.”

“Did they move the people out of the wooden houses or were they already empty?”

“Yes, there was no one in them. The men had gone to the front, and the women had either died of cold or hunger, or had been sent into the rear. Some had been transferred to stone houses, which were warmer. When I was working in the evacuation commission something happened which I shall never forget—a man I knew came to see me—he was a close friend of my first husband. I remember that when they graduated at the Shipbuilding Institute, and went to work at the Admiralty Shipyards, they liked to dress nicely. They got good money there, and dressed well, the pair of them. And suddenly this friend of my husband’s came to me, filthy, terrible-looking, so that I didn’t recognise him at first. He came to get evacuation documents for himself and his old mother. He said that she was dying of hunger. There was an order then that all old people should be taken out of Leningrad as there was nothing to feed them with. Old people and children had priority. I didn’t know why he wasn’t in the army, perhaps because of his health. But he turned up looking awful, covered in soot, black-faced, wearing a woman’s kerchief, that is, a woollen scarf somehow tied over his coat, with his collar turned up so that you could barely see his face. As I started to write out his document I looked at him and thought: My god, that’s a man I know well, my husband’s friend, a young man who’s not long finished college. He was probably 27, and now he looked such an old, old man. I wrote out the documents for him and his mother. He said: ‘First I’ll pull Mother on the sledge as far as the Finland Station, and then perhaps she’ll pull me for a little way.’ He, too, was very weak and emaciated from hunger. Taking turns, people were dragging one another to the Finland Station, and then they were taken across Lake Ladoga, along the Ice Road. I remember—I later found out—that he didn’t even get as far as Lake Ladoga, he died on the way, both he and his mother died from hunger and cold.”

As for the way their dear ones died, people didn’t say much about this—either because it is remembered as if through a haze, or because people found it too painful to speak of. But many spoke of how they had buried their relatives.

The cruel truth of the circumstances, the conditions, the merciless truth of feelings (and the indifference of hunger) still tortures those blockade survivors. But what happened, happened...

“As he lay there, I was thinking only of one thing (I wasn’t sorry for him): ‘If he dies, how am I going to bury him?’ You could get someone to bury a person somehow for bread, but I didn’t have any bread. When I went out and saw those dead people being pulled along on sledges, I thought, first, I won’t be able to sew him up like that, and to put him on a sledge. But for me the most terrible thing was the burial, not the fact that he would die—I didn’t think about that...” (*Nina Rogova*, a teacher,

19 Vasiliev Brothers St.).

It was not easy to carry out one's last duties to the dead in those conditions. Many people simply did not have the strength to do it. Nor did they have the means to get others to do it if their own strength was insufficient. Burials were a problem. The stories about burials are at times more painful than those of death. Yet the two are indivisible.

All the power of love, grief at the death of someone dear was channelled into the fervent wish at least to bury the loved one, it having proved impossible to save him or her. *Irina Kireyeva* recalled how she had buried her old nurse at the Volkovo Cemetery.

"I remember two soldiers trying and trying for a long time to break up that earth without success, for there turned out to be a cement vault there. Finally, somehow or other, they managed to squeeze the coffin in.

"And then there was a woman who entreated, who begged to be allowed to bury her daughter in the same grave. She had brought her there. Literally taking off everything she had, she begged that we bury her daughter right there. She herself could barely stand."

Lyudmila Mandrykina, a historian working at the Central State Military History Archives, said:

"And then came something that hit everybody—hungry November, hungry December. That was in 1941. At this point many people began dying. Alexei Shilov died then. He was one of the founders of archive keeping in the Soviet Union."

"How did he die?"

"How? He became ill, lost his strength. After all, we were all put in the second category—we had the ration cards of non-manual workers. At the time he was 60. Like all of us, he lived at his job. He worked at the History Archives (that was part of the Central Archives) and lived in the basement. He simply dropped off to sleep, just as almost everyone did who was dying of dystrophy due to hunger. After a time, we put him on a sledge, and since there was no chance of burying him at the cemetery, we took him to a fenced-off site, where Novaya Gollandia is. Do you know it? People were bringing their dead there on sledges, with coffins or without coffins, any old way. It was an official site. There were two or three people on duty. Later on they took the corpses away on vehicles."

"How did they bury people at the Cathedral of Our Saviour?"

"Around there things were quite different. They simply brought the dead there. Also a lot were left by the chemist's."

"By the chemist's? Why there?"

"I think it was because previously there'd always been some medical help available there. They left them outside the hospitals, too. People had no strength to take them any further. That was why we took Alexei Shilov there. Where was he buried? Leningrad scientists have asked me many times: 'Where is Shilov buried?' I don't know... Later on, Mikhail Akhun died, too. He was a very important military bibliographer. We were taking him to the Smolensky Cemetery, but we hadn't the energy to get that far. So we left the coffin half way there, in the snow. That was in January. On March 2, my mother died. That's a personal story, but I want to tell you what happened. When she died, I had a kind of *idée fixe*. Mother died



on March 2, and they had given her a ration card the day before. It was a dependant's card. She fell asleep in the same way. My mother lived very close to the Military Archives—at No. 1 Herzen Street was where I worked, and at No. 11 was where my mother lived.

"You lived there, in that same house?"

"Yes. I often went to see my mother. We had a little iron stove made. The fact that I'm alive now, of course, is thanks to my mother, because she divided the bread. Her bread and mine, she used to divide into three parts, then dry it on the stove, pour on boiling water, and three times a day we would eat, if you could call it that. And on March 2, mother grew weaker, and when I came home she died. She died before my eyes. I wanted to bury her at the Volkovo Cemetery, where my little sister's grave was. I went there. The city was quite empty. I couldn't even describe to you what the city was like. Somehow it always seemed to us like a city at the bottom of the sea, for everything was covered with hoar frost, all the wires, they were thick like those in a fridge where everything's frozen. All the wires were like that. The trams stood immobile, frozen. It was like a frozen realm of some sea king. And some folk had come from dry land and were walking about here! I arrived at the Volkovo Cemetery. There I met a woman who looked well. She asked: 'You need to bury someone?' 'Yes.' 'I can do it. But not for nothing.' 'All right,' I said. 'Then come here at four o'clock the day after tomorrow. Where shall I dig the grave?' I said: 'I'd like it next to my sister's.' We went there. She looked at the place and said: 'I'll dig the grave right next to it.'

"They helped me at work, and made the coffin, and we took the sledge

and set out along Nevsky Prospekt. That was the seventh of March, when there was already scarcely any snow. We were pulling the sledge. When we reached somewhere near Liteiny Prospekt there was such shelling! A militiaman shouted: 'You lot! Don't expect me to be your nursemaid! Get under that arch!' But the worker and our cleaner said they weren't going anywhere. I said: 'Nor am I.' We sat on the coffin and waited for the shelling to stop. We went on further. We walked for a long time—probably two hours. When we arrived at the cemetery, the grave was dug only to this depth, because the earth was so hard that digging was really out of the question. That woman said: 'Well, wait, I'll dig it.' My friends looked, and said: 'We're going.' It was such an evening, such a sunset, with everything aflame. At the cemetery you could see it all. I replied: 'You go, and I'll stay here.' They cried, and I cried, too. Then they went, and I remained. I felt I was freezing. And the woman was digging. She was very strong, really healthy. She said to me: 'You're freezing?' I said: 'I am.' 'I live in that church house,' she said, 'over there. You go there,' she told me. 'Rest a bit in my place. Then come back in about an hour. We'll see how things are then.' Well I went there, and I sat there about an hour."

"Were you warm there?"

"No, it was cold. But, all the same, it wasn't freezing. I sat there a bit. Then I went back—she hadn't done any more, maybe just about that much more. Then we decided we'd put the coffin in the snow and make a huge snowdrift. She said: 'Look, you come back in a month's time, at the beginning of April, and I'll do it all for you. In a month it will already be thawing. I'll do everything for you.' I had no feelings whatever. I said: 'Very well.' I said: 'Good, I'll be off.' She gave me a funny look and said: 'You probably won't make it.' 'No, I very likely won't.' 'So stay here with me.' I'd brought her a loaf of bread, and some sugar. Then she turned to me and said quite calmly: 'Don't be afraid, I won't do anything to you.' I said: 'I'm not afraid.' 'Well, then, let's go.'

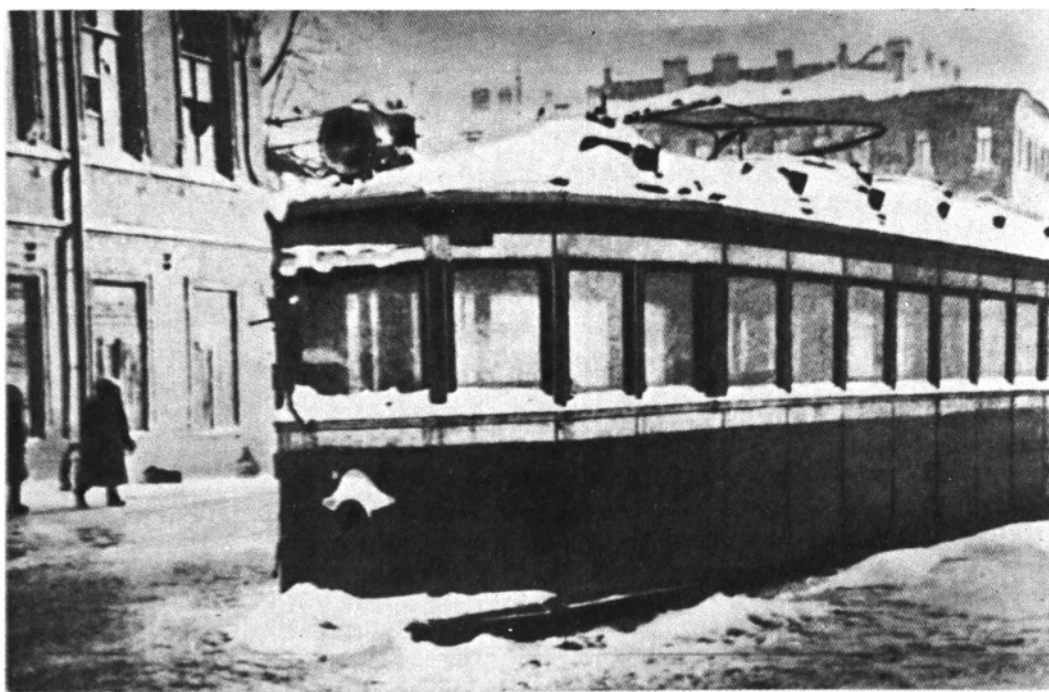
So we went to her little room—small, tiny, with nothing in it. Only at the bottom there were bunks, as in a sleeping car on the train, and above them were some more. She scraped some chips off a coffin, lit the stove, heated up some water, cut off a piece of bread from my loaf, and some sugar from my sugar, and said: 'Eat it.' I ate it. 'Now,' she said, 'lie down on the top bunk.' I collapsed into it. It was absolutely all the same to me! "

Subsequently the person would return to the living, to life. That life was short of external happiness, but Leningraders sought and found within themselves (and in others) strength, willpower and richness of spirit, and then life became brighter and warmer for those inside the ring of the blockade...

So Lyudmila Mandrykina returned from those horrors of the cemetery to her own world... "We didn't simply live like that," she said, as if arguing over the picture she herself had painted just a little while before. And it wasn't she, but life, that presented quite different pictures—pictures showing the heights attainable by the human spirit.

"I should like to tell you something interesting. There was a man—you probably know him—he later worked as director of the Institute of International Relations. His name was Yuri Frantsev, and he was a professor.

He also lived on the premises where he worked. On Moika Street there was at the time a library for the study of Party history. We were also living on the premises. I hadn't known him before that. One day he came to see me and said: 'I want to see how my neighbours are living.' 'You're welcome.' He was a very nice, very interesting man. Once, when it was already spring, he said to me: 'Let's think of something. We can't go on just like this all the time, can we?' (He was very, very thin, and tall, with greying hair.) 'We can't go on living only like this.' I said: 'All right. But what shall we do about it?' 'Let's get all the historians together, and we'll talk about what each one of us wants to. We'll meet in the Academy of Sciences Archives, down below.' Do you know it? It's on the embankment, where there used to be an empty site. So, he and I called together all the historians that were left in Leningrad. You really must speak to one woman (I think she's now head of the History Institute), Ksenia Serbina. She was in Leningrad throughout the blockade. She can tell you a great deal... Sometimes there would be five people gathered together, sometimes seven. Those were rather unusual seminars. Each one would speak, give information or reports on what they themselves chose. For instance, my subject was the war of 1812, and I spoke about the partisan Denis Davydov. Iraida Petrovskaya, one of our researchers (she now works at the Institute of Theatre and Music), spoke on the Moscow volunteer army and those of Pskov and St. Petersburg. Someone from the History Institute of the Academy of Sciences (I don't remember her name) spoke about the organisation of vineyards in the 5th century in Rome.*"



* Ksenia Serbina kindly gave us the name of this historian—Maria Sergeyenko.

"Probably it helped."

"It did. Ksenia Serbina told us about how the people of Tikhvin fought against the Swedish invaders."

"As long as the theme was remote from hunger?"

"Yes, it was a safety valve! We gave reports that lasted for hours, and we listened more intently than I ever remember doing since then."

"How many of you were there?"

"A lot came to listen—from ten to thirty people. No one fidgeted, no one got up and left, not a soul! We met every Friday. If we couldn't finish the subject one Friday, then we'd say—let's continue next time."

"And do you recall it now with pleasure?"

"I remember it with great pleasure! It was a real safety valve, for there you were busy doing what you would have been working on if all this had never happened... Then there was another thing. One day Alexander Victorov, a journalist, came to see me at the Military History Archives and said: 'I'd like to collect information about what scientists and scholars are doing. It doesn't matter what their subject is. What they are doing, what research work. The Gorky House of Scientists is collecting this material. Would you be good enough to ask the historians about this?' It turned out that everyone was involved in something. Eventually a book was to have been published. That would have been a splendid book. I believe Orbeli was heading the project. It even got as far as corrected proofs. But then came difficult years in Leningrad, and those proofs are still in our manuscript department. There's no difficulty about seeing them..."

LIFE UNDER THE BLOCKADE

The nazis tortured Leningrad and Leningraders with hunger. Mothers were racked with pity for children and husbands dying before their eyes, soldiers were racked with pity for dying mothers, wives and children. The nazis counted on Leningraders wavering and opening the city's gates.

Hitler explained the unforeseen delay in taking Leningrad to Germans and the world by saying: "We are deliberately not storming Leningrad for the time being. Leningrad will eat itself up."

Meanwhile the nazis tried to storm the city time and again. The assaults continued, including the most formidable of them all—the assault of hunger.

People's needs were rapidly diminishing, concentrating with heightened urgency on bread, warmth and water.

"Hunger is everything!" exclaimed Dr. Samovarova, who had lived through the blockade and verified the truth of this not only with regard to others but herself. "You know what our greatest happiness was? It was when they raised the bread ration to 300 grammes. Do you know that? People cried in the baker's and threw their arms round one another. It was like the glorious day of Easter Sunday, it was such happiness!"

Even 300 grammes of bread (without any other food) was still a death-

spelling ration. Yet the ration had been 200 grammes, and even 125! And people were without water, without firewood, without light!

City conditions did not make adaptation easy. Gas and central heating ceased, and there were no old-fashioned stoves in many houses. A pail of water, like firewood, had become a problem that was often difficult and at times insoluble. Lighting was also a problem. A wick lamp, one might think, is a simple matter. But what about fuel for it? Where could one get lamp oil or paraffin? Even daylight was of no avail, for many houses, perhaps even the majority, had suffered from bombing and shelling, the glass had gone and the windows were boarded up, covered with blankets or blocked with rags or mattresses. Consequently the rooms were always dark (people no longer spoke of glazing their windows but of "plywooding" them).

"Borya had devised a good wick lamp—an untippable inkwell with a glass tube in it to act as a wick," *Faina Prusova* wrote in her diary. "It was an invention, an event."

It was dark in the streets too: the blackout blue lamps were screwed into all street lights.

"When the blue lamps were also turned off, we had to go about by memory. When the sky was light you could get your bearings by the roofs of houses, but when the sky was dark that was worse. There were no vehicles on the roads, and you kept bumping into people who did not have a luminous badge in their lapel" (from the diary of *O. P. Solovieva*, a worker at the Kirov Spinning Mills).

The darkness had an oppressive effect. It was extremely difficult to get used to that frosty gloom and adapt oneself to it.

The naive, frank notebook of 17-year-old Lida K.,* who worked in a hairdresser's, when they were still functioning, gives this description of her nightly dash through Leningrad, which pressed in upon her with its endless darkness.

"There'd be times when you'd come out of the hairdresser's, and it would be so dark that it might have been an abyss, and you'd hold your hands out before you as you walked.

"Once I was walking along in absolute darkness, for the moonlit nights had come to an end. I had to cross the road, and I could hear some vehicle travelling along. I waited, listening, and it went on a bit, then stopped somewhere in the distance. I walked calmly across the road, held my hands out in front of me all the while, one of them empty, the other holding the case containing my hairdressing kit (I was all but running in the dark), and evidently I was keeping so near to the pavement that I nearly bumped into a taxi, even fell backwards, because I'd been walking so fast. I almost dropped my case. I heard the taxi door open, and the driver asked: 'Who's that?' I kept quiet, stood there feeling uneasy, then thought never mind, I can't be seen, anyway. After that I decided to walk along the pavement (and why I didn't like walking along the pavement was because you kept bashing into people all the time). Well, so I was nearing

* In the entries brought to us there's nothing but the initial to give a clue to the girl's surname—and we did not manage to establish what it was.

the corner of Sovietskaya Street and Suvorovsky Prospekt, walking along by the wall, knowing that I had to turn to the right soon. Suddenly—I'd lost track of where I was going—I collided with something big and round, and stood there embracing it until I realised that it was a barrel with sand and that I had lost my way in my own courtyard."

"So you returned from the clinic?" we asked *Irina Kireyeva*.

"Yes, after I'd been there for a little while I went home. Our old nanny was still alive, but she was already dying from starvation. We did our best to save her. At the clinic they gave us some powders—worth their weight in gold—and we thought that if we took those powders home we might save our dear ones. I remember that we kept feeding them to nanny, who of course was already terribly emaciated, so far gone that hunger diarrhoea had set in. She died before our eyes. And before that our 18-year-old boy cousin had died, and our aunt and uncle. In January and February whole families died off. What happened was a nightmare. Our aunt was in the military hospital. My mother was in bed with terrible dropsy—she was then probably younger than I am now. Grandma was in bed, so was nanny. There was no water. It was dark and cold."

"Did you still have electricity?"

"No electricity. A small stove had been installed. A soldier came and put it in for us. As I was the fittest and the eldest of the children (my sister was younger than me) I had to go for water. We got it through an open hatch. I would go out every morning—that was a feat, too. We had no bucket and made do with a pitcher that held, say, three litres. It was not easy to get this water. It was a long way to walk to the Neva. The hatch was kept open. Every day we found more and more bodies of people who hadn't been able to make it to the water, and afterwards water covered them turning to ice. So there was this hill and a crust of ice, and beneath the crust were corpses. It was terrifying. We crawled over them, got our water and took it home."

"Could you see them through the ice?"

"Yes."

Klavdia Dubrovina (71 Serdobolskaya St.) was then in her early twenties. She worked as a turner and served in a AA unit. There are many things she now remembers with a smile from her youth in besieged Leningrad. It seemed to us that there could have been no gaiety, but somehow she smiles at the thought of her difficult life in those years.

"Before the war I was one of those who never possessed ordinary stockings. I'd only wear silk ones, and high-heeled shoes. But when life gave me such a jolt, I changed my ways. True, in the first few days everything vanished like lightning from Leningrad shops. Before that there had been bars of chocolate on the shelves just like there are now, but in a few days there was nothing! Everything was sold out in a trice, for everyone was trying to get together some kind of reserves. But ration cards were quickly introduced. It was the same with manufactured goods. I realised I'd better do something about it. I dashed off to the shop and managed to get some ordinary cotton stockings, black ones at that, with a rib. How many pairs

there were I can't remember—six, I think—and I bought all six and put them all on at once. And I didn't take those six pairs off. Just imagine, I kept on those six pairs—to save myself from the cold! Then there was the way I got some footwear. I was wondering what on earth I could do. I'd be lost without something on my feet. But I had some old fox skins lying about at home. Somewhere I picked up some kind of peculiar boots (I bought them from someone—in those days people sold things for a crust of bread). They were run up on a machine from flannel, and were very thin. But at least you could put your feet into them. I wrapped those fox skins round like footcloths and then put my feet into the 'boots'. But I couldn't go out into the street in them—they were like slippers, with a very thin sole. Somewhere in a corridor I found some old galoshes—a man's, huge ones (evidently the biggest size), with long pointed toes. I pushed my 'boots' into those galoshes, made some holes and laced them up the way people used to lace up the old bast peasant shoes. And that's how I saved my feet and legs. I was warm about the feet all the time. Otherwise I'd have been done for... Now about washing ourselves. Of course there was no water. So when I left home in the morning to go to the factory, I had one thing with me, a piece of rag in my pocket. I'd go out into the street and there'd be snow, I'd take some, rub my hands with the snow, which took the place of water, and that was all. Well, I'd probably wipe my face with the rag. I never did any more than that, for there was no water at all. Well, in the canteen where they fed us there was a little."

Ivan Korotkov, an artist:

"What happened here? In some places the water still ran along the water supply pipes, and from the open hatches you could get some in a bucket. But such great ice hills formed. On Nevsky Prospekt, right by the Gostiny Dvor, there was a really high one. How did it come about? Well, when the bucket was full, water would spill out and run down, and the ice grew and grew until it was two or three metres high. Then it was a whole adventure to get up there. I used to fetch the water. You'd manage to get up there (I was wearing soldier's boots), but how would you get back? With the buckets. Well, sometimes you'd sit down on top of the hill and slide down without mishap, but sometimes you'd come a cropper. Once again you'd spill your water, and the hill would continue to grow endlessly. That's how it was on the slopes down to the Neva, too, for those who went to draw their water from the Neva itself."

Galina Petrova:

"Yes, we fetched our water from the Neva. I remember it very clearly. It was opposite the Bronze Horseman. We went to it through the Alexandrovsky Garden. There was a large ice hole there, we knelt at the edge of it and drew up the water in a bucket. I always went with my father, and we had a bucket and a big milk can. By the time we'd get home with the water it would be frozen, of course, and when we got there we had to thaw it out. The water was, naturally, dirty. Well, we boiled it. There was a little for food, and then we had to have some for washing. We had to go for water frequently. It was terribly slippery, and to get down to the ice hole was very awkward. You see, people were very weak. It often happened that they'd get their pail full of water and then couldn't get it to the

top of the bank. Everyone helped one another. They dragged the buckets to the top, but the water would spill out again. Near the Senate and the Synod stood some ship, and the sailors on it used to come and help the old people. You couldn't make out, however, whether a person was old or young. For one thing they were all so wrapped up, and for another thing there were these wick lamps, and because of them we were all as black as the devil."

"Once I asked a man to help, and he said: "(this is from the account given by *Valentina Zaborovskaya*, 116 Varshavskaya St.) "'Young lady,' he said, 'if I could help I'd bring you ten bucketfuls.'"

"The man couldn't fetch me some water! I couldn't understand whether he was a young man or an old one, you couldn't tell, because people somehow changed an awful lot."

"Well, in the end I got the water. I was taking it upstairs—there was an old woman living on the first floor. Well, so I was taking the water up one step at a time, and I kept counting how many more stairs I'd got left! I'd negotiate a step, then count—one, two, three, four. How many more had I got to go? I did not cling to the banister, I was holding the saucepan, which was also attached to me by a string, and I was walking up the stairs. I'd get up one step and take a breather. I couldn't carry a saucepan of water up the stairs. That's how feeble I'd become! "

"In bitter frost we queued up for about two hours, and finally filled all our vessels. We dragged our sledge with the greatest possible caution through the icy streets. We still had to go through a courtyard, then turn the corner of our block. The courtyard was filled with frozen snow, and the path ran like a narrow trench between the snowdrifts. When we were reaching the corner where we had to turn, a girl from the volunteer patrol came towards us pulling a sledge too. On it lay two corpses, probably already frozen for a long time. The pathway was narrow, it was difficult to move aside, and at the turn a stiff frozen leg brushed against our sledge, and it overturned. Our water! My sister and I stood there stunned, absolutely drained of strength. We sat down on the sledge and cried..." (*Zinaida Ostrovskaya*, 34 Lenin St.).

People dismantled wooden houses for the factories and offices, and part of the firewood was given to those who took part in the dismantling.

This was done by the permanent AA fighters. It sounds valorous, that word 'fighters', but these were actually 18-19-year-old girls, and girls who were drained by hunger.

Here is the story told by one of them—*Klavdia Dubrovina*.

"Every day several of us had to be detailed for house-breaking and bringing back the firewood. I don't know how much strength we had, but we had some, perhaps because we were young."

"We had these big sledges, the most ordinary big sledges, and we used to put our crowbars on them. At first we were nearby, at Novaya Derevnya, right here, and later on we had to travel a long way—to Ozerki, Shuvalovo, we had to go there. We'd go in the morning and be there all day. We'd demolish the houses with these crowbars, pile the wood on these sledges and bring it here."

"Yourselves?"

"That's right."

"You didn't have horses?"

"My goodness, no!"

"We pulled them ourselves, but there were several of us to one sledge. Well, when it was winter, it was easier, but when spring came, it was very difficult. We literally dragged them over the bridge—the snow there melted very fast, and it was hard to get them across the bridge.

"But I must repeat that although it was difficult, it saved us! I couldn't manage at home—I had nothing there, and there were still three dreadful winters ahead of us, and I had nothing to heat the place with and it would have been all up with me. But here we got fuel for the military hospitals, and for the district committee, and for our barracks. We were warm there, there was heating. We brought fuel for ourselves. We got warm, we dried our footcloths, we had to dry everything, for everything we wore was wet and needed drying. So that's the way we lived..."

But everybody kept their eyes open for what was near them and what they had the strength for.

"At No. 40 we had central heating but it wasn't working. It was cold in the rooms, but in the kitchen there was a wood-burning stove for cooking. There was just one neighbour left in the flat, so we went out together for firewood. There weren't any more fences around—they'd all been sawn up (they were all wooden ones in our neighbourhood). The neighbour and I sawed down posts (they were this high). I would lie on the ground sawing with a one-handed hacksaw (with what strength I'd got) and then she'd lie down and saw. So we'd fetch the wood, light the stove and sometimes boil something right away" (*Zoya Vasilyeva*).

Galina Marchenko (55 Primorsky Prospekt) was a child at the time, but she still remembers—she'll never forget it—how infinitely important were bread, water and firewood:

"Later on, as I was saying, we stopped going out to the bomb-shelter when they were shelling, because we hadn't the strength. When there was an alert, we just lay down and covered ourselves up. We were living on the first floor, and the windows were nailed up, as if for all time. We never went out. Everyone else had moved out—it was a communal flat, with four rooms. We moved into the smallest room, my aunt's, and bit by bit we broke up the floors of the others. I don't remember what kind of floors they were—parquet or ordinary painted ones. And we burnt them. We had only a few books and we did not want to burn them. We just had one bed, some chairs and a sofa left. On the sofa there were three square cushions and bolsters, and we gradually burnt those, too, for they were filled with straw. Where the *burzhuika*, a temporary makeshift iron stove, came from, who brought it, or when we purchased it, I don't remember. The *burzhuika* was a little one, and we used to cut up our bread in tiny pieces and dry these on the stove—they stuck to it. The bread was such sticky stuff. We used to chew these little rusks we made."

"The bread was moist, yet it was better to eat it dry? Why was that?"

"Because you could keep a piece of bread in your mouth longer that way..."

Alexandra Den, a former employee at Leningrad Radio, talked and showed us places:

"This is where our temporary stove was, and the parquet's still ruined. To begin with we burnt the kitchen shelves, then the kitchen tables. And then all the rest of the furniture."

Vladimir Den, son of Alexandra Den, also joined in the conversation:

"I think people considered any talk of food to be shocking. They understood very well that if they went to someone's home they should act as though they weren't in the least hungry. You could eat in the presence of a stranger, although this was felt to be bad form. But you could, and people were very clever at pretending that they themselves did not want to eat..."

He had observed this and remembered even though he was only a boy at the time.

"We haven't yet got to the question of what we cooked on," Alexandra Den reminded us.

"I burnt the books with my own hands, and to begin with I tried to pick out the ones that were not so good as others," Vladimir Den went on, glancing at his mother. "At first it was all kinds of rubbish, some I hadn't seen before the war. Behind the bookcase there turned out to be all sorts of brochures and technical instructions, which had evidently got there by chance. After that I went on to the books that were of the least interest to me—copies of the journal *European Herald*, and something else of that kind. Then, I think, I burnt the German classics, and after that it was Shakespeare. I also burnt Pushkin, I don't remember whose edition it was—I think the Marks edition, in blue and gold. The well-known many-volume edition of Tolstoy's works went into the fire, too—the books had grey-green covers with a metal medallion in the corner."

"But it was I who mainly burnt Schiller and Goethe," his mother added guiltily.

"We burnt the furniture," her son Vladimir continued. "There was an old-fashioned wardrobe, you know the kind, with two drawers at the bottom. It kept our fire going for twenty days. Father was a precise kind of man, and he wanted to see how long it would last. So he kept count. We burnt the wardrobe for twenty days."

So we talked with mother and son, and their flat, the things that had survived in it, the walls and the scorched parquet also played their part in the conversation, also "reminisced".

It was not things that were valued by the real blockade survivors—for example, not a cupboard, but the firewood you could get from a massive cupboard...

"A friend of my husband said that he had taken a cupboard to the market—and nobody wanted it. Then, right there before everyone's eyes, he chopped it up. And he'd asked a price of, say—ten roubles for the cupboard, yet he sold the firewood for 20 roubles! I only remember that he sold the cupboard for firewood at twice the value of the cupboard" (*Nina Rogova*).

In the room in which *Alexandra Arsenyeva* lived the main thing was lacking—the stove!

"There was no stove, I didn't know where to buy a stove for bread. And how could I spare the bread? I had an office employee's ration card, and you couldn't get anything in the canteen on a child's ration card. So the child's ration card was wasted, and my daughter and I both ate in the canteen on one office worker's card. I knew I might collapse any day. My little girl was still all right. True, she was such a quiet little thing, and would sit silently waiting until we went to the canteen..."

Sometimes people discovered old *burzhuikas* which had been tucked away in attics since the early years after the revolution. They would feed them with rags, old shoes, parquet flooring, and mattresses, but the principal source of fuel was wooden houses. These heated offices and factories, and were distributed in an organised way, through the district executive committees.

But it wasn't enough to find firewood, to buy or barter for it—you had to chop it up and get it home. That was a problem as well.

"I went searching for some sort of firewood in the cellar. I found some logs that had to be chopped up into small chips for the *burzhuika*, but I hadn't the strength to do it. I raised the axe, but it immediately dropped to the ground. I burst into tears and said: 'What's the matter with me? I'm not ill, I'm healthy, so why haven't I any strength?'" (from the diary of *Ulyana Popova*, 46, 11th Line, Vasilievsky Island).

They slept in their clothes, for months on end—the living alongside the dead.

Klavdia Dubrovina's neighbour moved in with her ("I was very sorry for her"). The neighbour died in her flat.

"She lay here with me; that was where I lay, and she lay here," she said, pointing to where the beds had stood.

"Did that go on for long?"

"A long time, until spring."

"Till spring?"

"Yes, we lay like that. Also in our flat, nearby, were a girl, a man and another woman lying dead..."

"You were going to work and coming back home again?"

"Yes, I wasn't home during the day, there was no point in my being there... I ate at work on my ration card, whatever was given us."

"Well, and where did you spend the nights?"

"Here at home. It was terrible spending the night here, of course, for the windows had been blown out, and the frost, the cold, were frightful. First of all, I had cut myself off from daylight completely—while I still had the strength I got down to covering up the two windows—one with a blanket, the other with an old carpet, so that there would be no draughts from there. But that deprived me of light. Here is what I did: when coming home in the dark I would head straight for my bed. I would climb into my burrow, as I called my bed, and lie there till morning in that cold... How did I manage it? I piled several pillows on top of me, in fact I made a burrow."

"And you didn't undress?"

"Not at all."

"Do you mean to say you left your felt boots on?"



Volodya Den, 1939.

"No, I took those off. I'd take those off my feet, and remove my coat, and leave everything else on, and I didn't take them off till spring."

"Until when was that?"

"Once I reckoned it out—until they attached me to an AA unit in March—so until March."

"So that means from December to March you slept with your clothes on?"

"Yes, approximately that, but maybe even longer."

"And you and the neighbour lived in that room together?"

"No, she lived in the next room, but she was so old, such an elderly woman, she couldn't do anything... She was so sick. She also asked me if I'd bring her water for the time being, and heat it for her. I got hold of a *burzhuika* in return for bread, too, a little thing it was. But what could you expect from that *burzhuika*? What with getting it going, and the time it took to boil water... And so we burnt all the parquet flooring, we broke up all the chairs for fuel (I did all this, because I was stronger), and burnt the books. I had a lot of books, and so did she (she was an intellectual type of woman, and she had very many books). We did not look to see what they were, we burnt them all. But that didn't last long, and then there was nothing left! So she died in my room."

"In your room?"

"Yes. I came home and she was lying there dead. Somehow this was also a matter of indifference to me. People were dying all around. I'd simply get into that burrow—I'd take my coat and boots off—and I'd get into it, for the cold was frightful, and I'd put on an old scarf, too. When I rose in the morning that scarf was frozen to my skin all round my neck. I'd tear it off, get up, put on my coat and go to work..."

"I slept beneath two padded quilts and put two heated irons in the bed—one for my feet, the other for my chest and hands. In the morning the quilts were covered with white hoar frost" (*Ulyana Popova*).

"I can't explain what the colour of my skin was like—after many months of using a wick lamp the soot had eaten into it... I slept in my boots... Sweater, felt boots, my greatcoat, and my brother's" (*Maya Babich*).

And after that—a Russian steam bath! Can you imagine it!

"The first bath!" Maya Babich exclaimed. "Oh...! During the first few days they queued up for eight hours or so—at ten in the morning they'd take a place in the queue and towards evening they went in. Still, I managed to get in after a couple of weeks.

"It was so horrible when they were all naked and kept falling—they hadn't the strength to carry the bowls of water. My god! What a nightmare sight it was! Many of them had no soap, and some rubbed and rubbed away without it. And fell down on the spot. The queue moved slowly, people took a long time washing, but there was hot water."

We were given many blockade diaries, and some of them were read aloud onto tape for us by their authors, who provided commentaries. Historian *Galina Babinskaya*, a tall, handsome woman, although no longer young, sees her flat as a kind of museum of what her family went through during the blockade. She showed us fragments of glass still sparkling in the damaged glossy surface of the grand piano. The moulded ceiling—it was an old flat, a "St. Petersburg" apartment—had also been damaged, and this was noticeable, too.

Galina Babinskaya has a piece about the public baths in her diary (she was 18 at the time): "On the third of March the Raznochinnaya Baths (they were in Raznochinnaya Street) were opened. Our whole family went there...". Others also recall that rare miracle of the spring of 1942—a hot bath. And how a person suddenly felt when he once again saw his own and others' nude bodies (people lived and slept for months without taking their clothes off).

Margarita Neverova (26 Rubinstein St.), a former actress, remembers all the details of one such day and how they were told: "Run, girls, run, they've heated the baths in Kazachy. Hurry, hurry!"—and the whole staff of the city executive committee dashed off to the baths. *Maria Syutkina*, then a shop Party organiser at the Kirov Works, helped build a bath-house at the hospital—a simple affair, like a country one.

Yelena Averyanova-Fyodorova, who kept a diary, remembers very clearly how in March 1942 some of them were given tickets for the Mytninskaya Baths. There weren't enough tickets to go round, and they were given to the best workers. "What joy that was, to wash yourself with hot water!"

Water, firewood, warmth... And, of course, bread. Above all it is to this that the main thread of the reminiscences leads, with this, probably, are associated the most painful and terrible ordeals. In those days it was in grammes of bread that people measured their chances and hopes of surviving to see the victory that was bound to come.

What dramas—some visible to the world, others not—were played out every day around a piece of bread (which meant life or death), what com-

plex feelings—the loftiest and the basest—seethed in the queues waiting for bread, over *burzhuikas* on which they dried the bread and divided it up!

Those priceless, merciless grammes—people today speak of them with delight and with horror.

“When they handed out that bread—125 grammes—can you imagine it? And they’d give us a loaf, and we’d bring weights and begin to divide it into 125 gramme pieces.

“You imagine what it was like in that room. All those workers were watching. They didn’t believe their eyes that this was the size of the ration, and each one was afraid to be cheated of even a crumb of bread” (*Maria Syutkina*).

“A bomb dropped on our house. It didn’t explode, but we were moved to the nearby bomb-shelter. It was the former imperial wine cellars beneath the Hermitage, on the side of the Palace Embankment... They were enormous cellars, vaulted, a whole series of them... There was no light, just some wick lamps burning here and there. A mother—who was just a girl—was settled in a vaulted niche, on a plank bed, with three tiny children. It was awful to look at the children—they were tiny old folk—big heads, thin legs, barely able to walk across the floor in the gloom of that huge cellar. I went into the shelter early in the morning of December 25. The young mother was standing by the boiling water urn. Her hands were trembling, and with tears of joy she was showing people a piece of sticky heavy bread and kept saying over and over again: ‘They’ve put the ration up, look, they’ve put it up! There’ll be something for the children to eat!’

“That day the bread ration had been increased, and for the four of them she’d got 800 grammes.

“And hope had raised its head” (*Zinaida Ostrovskaya*).

Some stories came our way—vague, second-hand ones—about bread being stolen (by adolescents or men, who suffered most from hunger pains and proved to have the least power of endurance). But when we began to question people, to ascertain how many times they had themselves seen it happen, it turned out, nevertheless, that there were not many instances. In such a big city, of course, all kind of things happened.

“One morning as I was walking to work, I saw a little old man at the corner of Lesnoi and Neishlotsky lanes driving a cart with bread. The bread was covered with canvas. Suddenly about 15 boys in factory training school uniforms appeared from out of the blue. They yanked the bread off with iron hooks and ran away. There was no one there to stop them, and it wouldn’t have been possible. The poor old man cried. They’ll shoot me, he said. But then a militiaman appeared, and also a number of workers who’d seen it all. The militiaman drew up his report and it turned out that there were 52 loaves missing. I don’t know what happened after that, but I don’t think the old man was blamed for it at all. They weren’t thieves, those boys. They were hungry, cold, unwashed, and absolute children still—many of them with no family left. And they were operating machines in the factory” (from recorded reminiscences of *Yekaterina Yanishevskaya*, 90 Grazhdansky Prospekt).

Or a cart carrying barrels was hit by a missile and thick jam was scattered about. There were plenty of people ready to gather it up! But that was not a cause for wonder—something else was. A lorry was hit and bread lay all over the place, but no one took it for themselves!

"Heavy firing began... Somehow I managed to crawl as far as the baker's—we had one on the corner of Stachek Prospekt, it's a café now. People there were shouting, there was a lot of noise. Some lay on the floor, others had hidden behind the counters. But nobody touched a thing! There were the loaves, and no one took them! " (*Yevgenia Kozlovskaya* was deputy chairman of the Kirov district executive committee during the blockade. 8/2 Prospekt Stachek).

The picture would be incomplete if we recalled one kind of story and not another, about the snatchers of bread, of the "makeweights", little pieces cut to size to make up the ration. People also speak of them in different ways. On the one hand there are cases like the following, which are deeply etched in the memory: a woman and her children thought longingly of tomorrow's bread, and in the night dreamed they were already eating it. But a hand stretched out and the bread disappeared in the stranger's mouth. That kind of thing is remembered when even the most terrible firing fades from the memory. How grieved people were over the loss of that bit of makeweight—even thirty years later, they are embarrassed as they recall it. But they grieve even more over those adolescent boys and men who forgot themselves. Even then, at that terrible instant, they pitied them, although they shouted at them with the rest of the indignant queue, and even beat them.

"I had my brother's wife living with me, with her little child of four and her elderly mother. And then they gave me her sister's ration card, too, and asked me to get the bread. So I went off to the baker's, and got bread for the whole family. Well, they gave me a tiny loaf and a little bit of makeweight, just about 50 grammes. I was just taking the bread from the assistant when suddenly a youth, a hungry, emaciated youth of sixteen or seventeen, snatched the loaf! He was so famished he started gnawing at it straightaway—eating, eating, eating! I screamed: 'Oh! What am I going to do? That was bread for a whole big family, what am I going to take home?' The women immediately shut the shop door so that the boy couldn't run away, and began to beat him. 'What have you done,' they demanded, 'you've left a family without bread! ' And all the time he was gulping it down as fast as he could. They got the remains of the loaf from him, and I had that little bit of makeweight. I stood and wondered how I could possibly go home with it! At the same time I felt sorry for him. It was starvation, I thought, that had made him act like that—he wouldn't have done it otherwise. So I pitied him. 'That's enough,' I said. 'Stop hitting him.' I couldn't get that incident out of my mind. A terrible thing, I thought, that hunger can push a man to such an extreme! It was out of hunger that he grabbed the bread, after all! " (*Yulia Popova*).

It was with tears of mortification, guilt and surprise at what hunger had done to her that *Taisia Meshchankina* (9 Sofia Kovalevskaya St.) spoke of the following incident. As she approached the shop a similar scene was unfolding. A lad had snatched some bread, fallen to the ground and, lying

there, was greedily gulping it down... She was seized with avenging wrath and resentment and she also began whamming into the boy, pushing him about in the attempt to save somebody's bread. Suddenly she felt with her hand a piece of bread on the ground... But it's better to listen to her story, starting from those three days in December when there was no bread at all in the shops. The bakeries had come to a standstill.

"One night during those grim three days I felt I was dying. My saliva was flowing endlessly. The girl, my daughter, lay by my side. I had the feeling that I must inevitably die that night. But as I am religious (and I'm not going to hide the fact), I got down on my knees in the dark of the night and said: 'Lord, grant that I may live to the morning, so that my child will not see me dead. Later they'll take her to the nursery, please grant that she doesn't see me dead.' I went into the kitchen. It wasn't our own flat—we were living there, because my block of flats at No. 54 Kom-somol Street had been destroyed by bombing. Well, I went into the kitchen and—where I got the strength from I don't know—and moved the table out. Behind it—I swear to God—I found some greaseproof paper that had once had butter wrapped up in it, and besides that there were three dried peas and some potato peel. How greedily I scooped it up. I saved the peas and the potato peel to make soup the next day, but the paper I stuffed in my mouth. It seems to me that it was because of that paper I survived."

"Only the wrapping paper from the butter? There was no butter?"

"Just paper. Because of that paper I lived till six o'clock in the morning. At six we all rushed to the baker's for bread. I got to the baker's and saw them fighting. My god! What was it all about? They told me that people were beating a boy who'd taken someone else's bread. And you know, I also started beating him, wondering how could he—we'd been three days without bread! Now you just imagine—I don't know how it was, but his bread just fell into my hand. I put it in my mouth—a miracle—and went on beating that boy. Then I said to myself: 'Good heavens! What am I doing? I've already got the bread in my mouth!' I moved away and walked out of the baker's."

"And you didn't get your bread?"

"I went back later for the bread. I felt ashamed, I realised what I'd done. I went home, and I couldn't forgive myself. And afterwards I went out and got our bread. I received 250 grammes, because I was a worker, and my little girl got 125 grammes."

But the real tragedy was the loss of a ration card. Especially at the beginning of the month, and especially if it meant that the whole family was deprived. Anyone who lost the card could consider himself the murderer of his own family. "I screamed so terribly that they stopped the tram," *Anna Kuzmina* said. "My hand went to my pocket, and there was neither pocket nor ration card. I gave such an awful scream that the tram stopped, and some woman came up to me and told me to go with her." That unknown woman was from a canteen, and for several critical days she fed 14-year-old Anya, her little sister and her mother with remnants of cabbage soup and some crumbs or other.

In the recollections of *Yekaterina Yanishevskaya* there is a scene that

seems to have gathered into itself the whole tragedy of a lost ration card and the special morality of that first winter of the blockade.

"In Engels Prospekt I saw an old man pulling sledges full of dead bodies barely covered with bast matting. Behind him was an old woman who could scarcely totter along. 'Wait, dearie, let me get on.' He stopped and said: 'What do you mean, old woman, can't you see what kind of a load I've got?' 'I can see, I can see, I'm going the same way. I lost the ration card yesterday, I'm going to die anyway, and so my family won't have to bother about me when I'm dead, take me to the cemetery, I'll sit on a tree stump there and freeze, and right there they'll bury me...' I had a little piece of bread in my pocket, about 150 grammes, and I gave it to her..."

It goes without saying that the sphere of people's interests, their human needs, contracted. But the hard-core needs acquired a greater intensity than ever before. Among them was the need not only for food and the warmth of the *burzhuika*, but also for the warmth of concern and sympathy. Never had the Leningrader been more in need of help and support, and never had someone else needed his help so much as in those days, months and years of the blockade. "Each one had his saviour," a Leningrad woman told me with conviction. Each was in need of someone, and each was needed by someone as much as bread, water, and warmth.

It was not only a question of physical help.

Spiritual nourishment, at a time when there was so little bread, meant very, very much! In fact it meant more than it had in "well-fed" times.

"I don't think people will ever listen to poetry as those hungry, bloated, scarcely living Leningraders listened to the work of the city's poets that winter," Olga Bergholtz, the poet, wrote in the foreword to the anthology *Leningrad Speaks*. "We know that because people found the strength to write about it to the radio and even went there to copy some poem they remembered. They were all kinds of people—among them students, housewives and army men."

Blockaded Leningrad had its own goddess—Compassion and Hope—and she spoke with the beleaguered citizens through verse. Through the verse of Olga Bergholtz.

"Her verse were often simple, simple in that it was so easy to remember, so rhythmically lodged itself in people's heads... You'd be walking along and you'd find yourself muttering some verse of hers. 'May it stand for ever, bathed in dawn...' Once I knew that by heart, and somehow it was a great help when I climbed up the tower and had to stand there on our library roof under shelling" (*Galina Ozerova*, 124 Sedov St.).

"Later on they started reading Olga Bergholtz's verses on the radio. I clearly remember how really good that was, they were in tune with our mood. They did a lot to shake us out of that wolfish brooding over food" (*Maya Babich*).

It seemed as though it was bread, bread above all, and then water and warmth! That everyone spoke and thought only of those things, and all desires were concentrated solely upon them, on the most vital things of

all. That and nothing else! But no, not at all. In the shrivelled body, suffering from hunger and humiliated by it, the spirit sought sustenance. The inner life continued. At times man surprised himself with his susceptibility to literature, music and the theatre. Poetry became vital to him, poetry and songs which helped him believe that his endless agony was not in vain. Leningraders needed much more, other things were quite essential to them. The living voice of their fellow sufferers, those in besieged Sevastopol. The confidence that Moscow would stand firm and repulse Guderian's tanks. And—more vital than even bread, water and warmth—was hope, the light of victory at the end of the icy tunnel...

People were advancing along that tunnel, having suppressed within themselves everything that might be considered superfluous or secondary.

But as soon as people began to have a little more warmth and light their feelings began to come alive, with incredible sensitivity to the simple joys—the sun, the sky and colours. Nothing was more delicious than a little round cake made of potato peel. Nothing shone brighter than an electric light. People learnt to appreciate the most simple and the most important things.

Alexandra Amosova, on the staff of the Hermitage Museum, told us of how in spring 1942 the beleaguered citizens once again—as if for the first time in their lives—rejoiced to see greenery, the earth that fed them...

"We gathered sackfuls of goosefoot grass and sorrel (we considered wild sorrel something fit for a gourmet), and picked all kinds of herbs. I had an urge to lie down on the ground and kiss it, because the earth alone could save people. If in that terrible time of winter we had had those grasses, then perhaps there would not have been so many dead all over the city, so many corpses. There was sunshine, light, and somewhere in the sky a lark was singing. And here we were simply stuffing that grass into us until we were full. It wasn't food, of course. But I remember that feeling so well—that you wanted to lie down, sprawl upon the earth and kiss it! Can you understand? The earth that gives us everything—bread and absolutely everything else that keeps a man alive."

The slightest relief—a bigger bread ration or a plate of nettle soup—was enough to thoroughly awaken the frozen spirit, which had been robbed of everything. At such a time people responded to simple joys with unprecedented delight and reverence—dry, clean asphalt, window frames with whole panes in them, a sun-warmed wall and bright green trees—no other spring could boast such a brightness of colour. Other miracles were a bed with clean sheets, and flowers which there was no need to gather and chew, or make into salad, but which could remain flowers growing in a flower bed.

AT WORK

What could possibly counteract such hunger? Quite soon many people felt the salutary strength of comradeship and tried to be with others. This took place in an organised way, under the leadership of Party committees,



Olga Bergholtz.

and it also happened instinctively, spontaneously, with people coming together through their work, and actually living at their factories. In factories special rooms were adapted, beds were put up, heating was turned on and facilities for living provided. People flocked together, and congregated with others in their shop, or their department, clung together, seeking warmth and help. It made work seem easier not to have to walk home and back in all weathers. The first, of course, to take advantage of this arrangement were single people or those whose families had been evacuated. It was more difficult if your family was still living in the city, for it was hard to leave your mother, wife and children on their own.

Many people lived at their place of work all through the blockade, hardly ever going "into the town". Work, defence duties and the restoration of ruined shops took all their energies. Their world had withdrawn into itself, like a man huddling up in the cold, his head hunched between his shoulders, retreating into himself. So they saw their factory as the sole refuge, tried to be among people. Even death is not so fearful when you are among human beings, among them, too, it is easier to contend with death.

Galina Ozerova, chief bibliographer at the Saltykov-Schedrin Public Library, spoke of it in these terms:

"I think they died because they remained alone in their homes. Whereas we, who had lived throughout that first blockade autumn in the Central Library, survived precisely thanks to the collective. After all, those who had more strength and know-how got on with such work as preparing fuel, chopping and sawing wood, clearing away the snow, and fetching water. Those who had taken to their beds and did not want to move—those

were forced to move and go outside. For instance, I pulled sledges of firewood to distant parts of the city for members of the staff who had decided to sit it out at home and no longer had the strength to get to the library. Most of them later died."

"So you took firewood to them?"

"Yes."

"Well, do you recollect going into those apartments? What did they look like?"

"It was ghastly—dark rooms, and frozen, absolutely yellow, bloated people."

"Did you have no conversations with them?"

"Oh yes, we talked. They were interested to know what was happening at the library, who was alive, and who dead—that was the main thing. And what were the forecasts about the Germans, were they advancing or not. But it was mainly about how people at the library were living and working and which of their comrades were alive, and how they were behaving—those were the things we mainly talked about."

But in the "city", concentration took place as well. Within one flat, everybody would move into the same room—the more crowded they were, the warmer. They warmed one another with their breath. People moved to their relatives and friends. Two, even three families would come together from various parts of the city. Family ties were reactivated. Living together it was easier to manage, to stand in a queue for bread, to fetch water and look after the children.

Living together in a situation like that was perhaps most helpful to people. The organisation, will and mind of the collective, it appeared, uncovered quite incredible possibilities.

Workers in the printshop where the city's ration cards were produced tell the story of how (when less and less began to be issued against the cards: from November 20th workers got 250 grammes, and office employees, dependants and children 125 grammes of bread—black, sticky, like putty, sodden, with an admixture of wood pulp and sawdust, and nothing else) they began to search round, to look everywhere and to examine everything with the inflamed eyes of hunger, as if to check once more for edibility everything about them.

"There were the matrices. They consisted of cigarette paper and a certain amount of flour paste for sticking them. They had been used, and they contained no lead and no paint, only paper. So we ground them up, made a kind of porridge and told each other that the porridge was O. K. or else there was carpenter's glue—that was like a jelly."

"So you had a professional dish out of your matrices?"

"Yes, we ate porridge made of them, and it wasn't bad! The amount of flour in it was infinitesimal, mostly it was paper, glue and a number of other ingredients" (*Eugeni Trenke*, 12 Martynov Embankment).

It was easier to organise at least some kind of feeding at work places.

"We were fed in the canteen," *Klavdia Dubrovina* said, then added, "if, of course, that interests you. We had ration cards for that..."

In the winter of 1941-42 she worked as a turner in a factory. Her stories contained precious details, but now and again she would break off and

say: "I'll be brief... Perhaps you don't need that, perhaps I should make it shorter?"

"We were given some coupons, and on those we could get a little thin gruel. But we would go up to the boiler and mix it with boiling water to make it go further, to give the impression we were eating more. There was boiling water in the canteen and we would add some more. Then we got some so-called yeast soup off the ration. Well, at that time, as long as something could be swallowed, you ate it and that was it. Later on, the men who remained with us because of their age or who were in reserved jobs, because there were some things that had to be done, well, they even died as they sat at table in the canteen. They died such a quiet death, it was so calm... At the factory it was terrible, of course. Well, what could we do? Starving people were working the machines, everywhere there were broken windows, and your hands froze to the metal. I worked with gloves on, because you froze to everything. People helped me. I didn't even have to ask the foreman. We had an engineer-technologist, Vasya Kirichenko, who went over to operating a machine, and he often came to me and asked, 'Well, can't you manage it? Let me help you.' (They didn't call him up because he was a sailor, and the sailors weren't called up till spring.) He showed me everything, and that was how I managed to learn this difficult trade.

"Later on we didn't work. We'd get there at the start of the shift and there'd be no electricity. The foreman would say: 'Sit and wait.' At first we would sit there for several hours and wait—and there'd still be no electricity. Later it stretched into days. They'd tell us: 'Come back in three days' time.' We began going to work less often. That's just about how we worked, everyone worked with intervals in between. Am I being brief enough?"

As *Maria Syutkina* was finishing her story she suddenly remembered that she still had a 1942 menu from the canteen of one of the factory shops, and she read us the names of dishes that took the place of those containing meat, fish and flour. But this was already in spring and summer 1942, when food became a little better:

"Plantain soup
Nettle and sorrel purée
Beet-top rissoles
Goosefoot rissoles
Cabbage-leaf schnitzel
Liver made from oilcake
Oilcake pastries
Fishmeal sauce
Casein pancakes
Yeast soup
Soya milk (on coupons)."

They could have cooked absolutely anything and it would have been eaten! It's true what the Germans used to say in olden times: "The best cook is hunger! "

"Grandpa, what about tank grease?" the granddaughter of *Pyotr Zenkov*, who was present during our talk, suddenly prompted, and her grandfather, not without surprise, recalled one of the family stories.

"That's right! I ate tank grease. My god! Do you know how it came about? A woman I knew was working in the shop where I used to work before the war. I was full-time Party secretary there for a spell. That's right. And suddenly she said: 'You know what? I've got a whole barrel of grease—they lubricate tanks with it. Come along!' And I tried some. What a miraculous thing! How we enjoyed it! And I took some home. You understand how it was?.."

The main thing about that form of community living was the mutual help, the joint activity, which kept up the spirits.

Part of the Zhdanov Shipyards had been evacuated to the Vyborg district of the city and there the workers began to make mines, working until December, as long as the electricity supplies held out. After that people could have gone home, but many of them stayed on to live at the factory.

The hungrier people got, the harder it was to work, yet work had to be done for the needs of the front and for the city, and also for the Leningraders themselves. Work helped to keep them going, and they clung to their work. In that frozen, depopulated city, drained of virtually its last ounce of strength, the majority of enterprises and institutions continued to function. The postwomen went on bringing letters, the printing shops put out ration cards, newspapers and leaflets, the district executive committees,



nursery schools and outpatients' clinics were still working, there were sparks of life in the archive offices, the Public Library, and the symphony orchestra. Work deadened the ever-present thought of food, which was driving people mad. Through their work people entered into the life of the country from which they were cut off.

G. A. Knyazev and his colleagues continued to write the *History of the USSR Academy of Sciences*. It was they themselves who most vitally needed this work. They were performing their duty, as archivists and historians they were doing what they could.

The majority were working on more practical jobs—to maintain the city's life, and most important, to supply the Leningrad Front, and incidentally others, too, with weapons, mines and missiles.

Maria Syutkina recalls how at the Kirov Works they lived in the rooms allocated to the technological bureau, and how they heated them with the wooden squares that made up the floors of the shops.

"Well, when spring came to the city we decided—as leaflets were being showered on us every day telling us that we were going to die anyway, from hunger or cold—the people's morale had to be raised somehow. You realise how it must have been with every day like that! We had to raise people's spirits somehow. So we decided to restore the copper foundry. Some of our women were coremakers, and we were given an order to make a 52 mm mine. We did what we could, but we could not make the main copper part, because we had no metal. We had metal for the cupola furnace, though, and we decided to start the cupola furnace up. But how were we to get it going? We had only one furnaceman left out of seven. The furnacemen had been fine tall men, and they'd died of starvation. There was only Chaginsky left, and he knew the cupola furnace well. But what was to be done? He was ill with scurvy, and even his teeth were falling out. A lot of people had scurvy then, by spring. We decided that the women had to be trained to operate the furnace. So we wrapped Chaginsky's feet up so that he could be stood upright and helped him to the furnace (it was 50-60 metres from the clinic). We half carried him there. He gave instructions on how to get the furnace going, and we did. So the women began to operate the cupola furnace. That department of our factory started up, and as soon as this happened, just imagine, people seemed to be reborn, and became so animated that they were even smiling. They began to believe we'd win after all."

The work itself was changing all the time. The blockade and the hunger it brought made everything special, from the movement of transport to what might have been thought the unchanging techniques of the machine operator's work.

The work became more and more connected with everyday living, with the family, to a greater extent than ever before. There are stories about work that are unusual even for that incredible way of life. Conceptions of what was possible changed. In the everyday accustomed surroundings of the factory shop there appeared things apparently unthinkable in production. There was no light. The working women did not know the first thing

about the work they had to do. Boys and girls, absolute children. All of them weak and without skill...

Fyodor Kozodoi (13 Traktornaya St.), former shop chief, then Party worker, secretary of a district committee, for example, cannot now, thirty and more years later, clearly understand how they managed to haul heavy machine tools to the third floor without a lift or a crane when they were getting the production of mines started in the Vyborg district.

All the stories about work are astounding.

"What year was that? It must have been 1941," *Vera Gavrilova* (14 Kasimov St.) said, trying to cast her mind back. "The plastics factory was evacuated to Borovichi. Our equipment hadn't been at all bad, and we had a very friendly collective, I recall. Virtually empty shops were all that was left at the factory. They'd taken the best machines away. All the shops were at a standstill by that time, there was no raw material for plastics. But then we started to master the production of F-1 and RGD grenades. It was going very well. Half the workers were women, half men. At twelve o'clock on the night shift once I saw that two machines were unmanned. We had no supervisor, so I went to look for the boys who operated them. We had just been allocated some trainees from a children's home, and I went to their hostel (it was quite near). I looked—Petya was lying asleep, and on top of him was a dead body..."

"Wait a minute, I don't understand. Where were they lying?"

"In the hostel. Well, the boys were exhausted and hungry, they had no food apart from what was on their ration cards. It was later that the idea of eating casein came up. So I got there. 'Goodness, Petya! What's the matter?' 'I overslept!' 'And what about Vitya?' 'As for Vitya, he's already dead.' And the boy came and started working. Don't ask me how he managed to stay on his feet! Yet nobody made the holes and whatever else they had to do to the grenades better than those boys."

People worked in all kinds of ways. There was no electricity, it wasn't turned on, or if it was on for a few hours, then arms production had priority. But the other places had to work, too. Wherever it was possible, people worked by hand. At the Bebel Factory they turned the lathes by hand. They made pouches for grenades, and repaired sheepskin jackets, and also belts.

"It'll be easier in the summer-time, because there'll be light. Winter's the most difficult period. It's cold in the shop, no heating. It's a big place, with windows on two sides. Outside there's 30° of frost. Our hands and feet are freezing. We turn the machines by hand. The machines are frozen."

That was from the diary of *Yelena Averyanova-Fyodorova*. She read her notes to us, explaining them as she went along. She read, she explained, and she wept.

"26.1.1942. I kept feeling frozen at work today, even though I was warmly dressed. But when your stomach's empty you won't be warm, whatever you put on..."

"27.1.1942. No bread anywhere. People were queueing from five in

the morning. The bakers' shops opened—and they were empty. They had to wait while it was baked and brought round. Shura stood there from seven o'clock and she only got bread at seven in the evening. Think of standing twelve hours in the open! And we ate that bread in an instant. We hadn't had a bite of anything all day; of course, once they'd brought the bread, you couldn't help eating it all at once. Earlier on we were able to put away a piece for later, but now we couldn't manage that.

"Today I worked for an hour and then we were let off to get bread.

"It's the second day I've been to work without having anything to eat. How can you work in such cold and what can you do? I had no choice but to go. On the way, in Kirillovskaya Street, outside No. 22, two corpses had been abandoned. You'd walk along, and nothing would shock you. People's feelings are so blunted that such things are regarded as normal, as if that is the way life should be—we are already used to that kind of thing.

"But the worst thing was that today the only hope was bread. Again there were no other foodstuffs. We got 50 grammes of groats each, and nothing more. It couldn't be any worse! Bread is life. In short, hold out! How hard it is to live through these terrible days!

"28.1.1942. Today they wouldn't let us leave work, despite all our entreaties and requests they wouldn't let us go home. But what was the use? Anyhow, no one was able to work. The machines were all frozen. And we were all like frozen lumps. It's not difficult to freeze if in the shop boiling water turns to ice immediately. The walls are all covered with snow and the windows with a thick layer of ice. How ever can anyone work in such a shop, where it is 25 below while it is 30 below outside—the only advantage being that there's no wind!

"We finished work at three and went home. It was bad, nothing to eat again. I went to find out where they were giving bread for the 29th. After all, it's death without bread."

Let's go back to the Vasiliev family. We've been through Zoya Vasilieva's story already, now let us turn to what her husband, Nikander, a foreman at the Metal Works, told us. If only it were possible not to interrupt the narrative, not to keep going back, not to have to put stories one after another but somehow to show simultaneously what happened to the Vasiliev children, to the people at his factory, to his wife at home, and later at the hospital, and to compare how other families were living and working at the same time, to see how *Natalia Petrushina*, a postwoman, was working, and also tram-driver *Anna Petrova*, and how the workers at the Kirov Works, and those from the Krasnaya Zarya Works were getting on in their ruined shops...

In various parts of the huge city people were struggling, suffering, overcoming their sufferings or not overcoming them, and all during the same period, and all that merged into a single picture, yet did not merge, for each life had its own special story, its own unique details, and the memory has also preserved these in different ways.

We should like to convey this multiplicity of life, without turning back every time. If only like this: "And at the same time..." Or: "At that very hour..." But all the same we have to turn back, and turning back means repetition. We often have to repeat ourselves. It is all about the same thing

—yet it is all about different things. Each story tells something new, if only about a minor twist of life. The countless repetitions in people's stories were not repetitions. They revealed more and more fresh details about what might be thought to be something already well known. They confirmed what was known and led us deeper, giving one and the same event a universal character, a logicity, a new dimension.

Here is *Nikander Vasiliev's* story:

"I'm 61 now, so during the war I was 26. I didn't serve in the army because I was immediately given an exemption. When the war started I was a senior foreman, with about 80 men and lads under me. And immediately all of them—I myself called on them to defend our homeland—all of them left for the army. And then I was asked: 'What do you think you're doing?' (I was a member of the Komsomol, of course.) 'We don't only have to fight at the front. It's necessary to fight here, too, to get the shop ready, and make weapons.' To cut a long story short, it turned out that the best people, the skilled ones, left, and in their place, of course, I got women."

"And what about apprentices?"

"There weren't many of those. There were some, but they were so weak from hunger... I had two or three of them. But mainly it was women, of course. They took women off from the canteens, from everywhere... Do you realise what a head foreman is? In the factory, in the shop? He has to carry out specific tasks and also work with people. And the people, you understand, were starving and cold. I'll never forget how we carried out one order. The 'katyusha' was already in production and we were given the job of turning the missiles, and the women had to do it. I remember it very well. There were 37 operations (I even got the Order of the Red Star for it) and all of them were carried out by women. At first they were reduced to tears, but then they mastered the job. It was terribly cold—minus 22-25 degrees inside the factory. They gave us long pipes, brought from the Bolshevik Plant. They were about 180-200 mm in diameter, with walls about 20 mm thick. The steel was tough (specially for armaments). The pipes were about 8 m long and had to be cut into 800 mm lengths. This had to be done on big planer machines. It takes an awful long time, because they must be under a constant stream of water all the time, and the water was already freezing on the way. The shavings did not fly off the machine, the bit kept breaking. And where could you get bits at such a time? Right then the smithy had only three or four hammers, that was all. So later I got together the men we had who were more or less all right and we forged the bits ourselves. Why do I tell you this? Because that cold, that frost, helped us with the pipes. At the Bolshevik Plant they were also having trouble with these bits, it was the most difficult operation of all. (I used to be a turner before I became a foreman. I was made foreman in 1938.) We began to do it like this. We'd start cutting and go in about 10 mm, then give a tap on the cylinder, and Bob's your uncle, the pipe would break off. Because the steel was brittle in the frost. In short, we surprised everyone."

"Did they break off evenly?"

"As if they'd been sliced through with a knife. In fact it continued

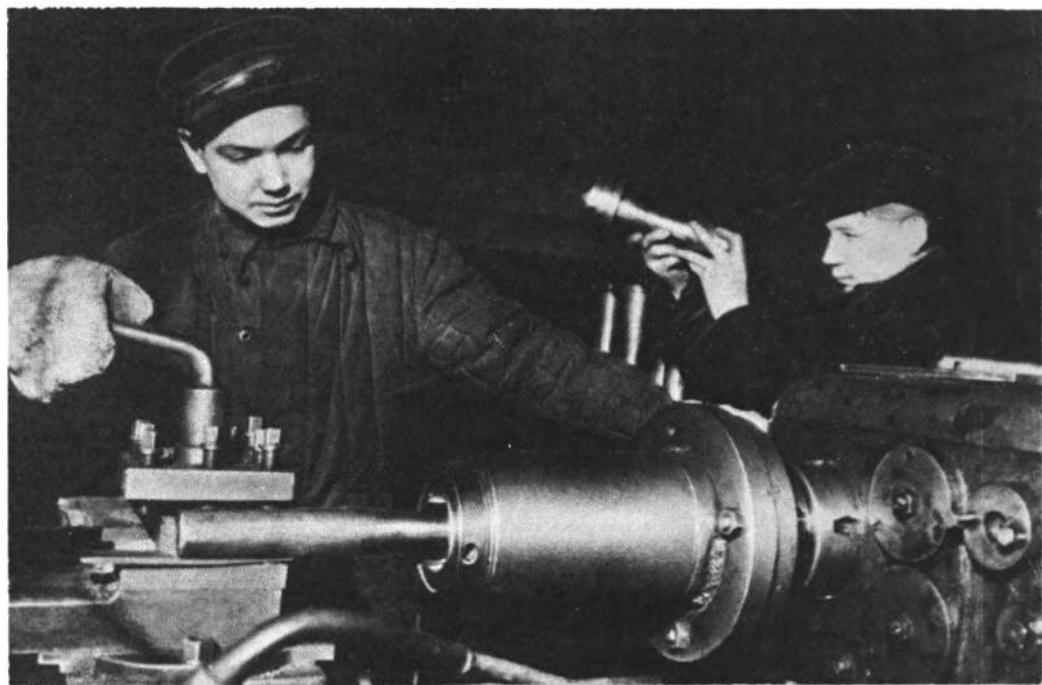
until all my main people had died. I remember one case. Before the war I'd had one grinder, the only one. What a man he was! One of our good-natured Russian muzhiks. He would drink, drink a lot, what do you expect. Well, that wasn't important. You should understand how he worked! Won so much praise at the factory! Everywhere there were posters that said what a hero he was, do you understand? I gave him all the support I could. I had sailors working under me after the war started, but they were in a bad way from starvation. We got some extra food but we gave that muzhik everything we had. He came to me one day and said: 'You know, I'm about to die.' 'What are you talking about!' I said. 'You're our only grinder, what are you on about!' 'I'm going to die!' And he left the office. In about twenty minutes a woman came to me and said: 'He's dead!' He lived somewhere on Vasilyevsky Island, and it was a long way to go. He had a little cubby hole at the factory and I tried to make it warm and cosy, but, of course, there was precious little warmth there. That's where he used to sleep. Family? His wife had died, his two sons had joined the army and he was left on his own. That man knew exactly that he was going to die in a few minutes' time. And he kept doing his bit right until his death, you understand?"

Perhaps it was a peculiarity of death from dystrophy, from starvation, or perhaps there was a heightened perception of death, which was all around. Whatever it was, it was common knowledge at the time that many people were aware of the moment of death's approach. As if they heard its footsteps, could see it.

"Why am I telling you this? In those grim conditions people worked, and they did it without letting anyone down. Before the war there was a rule: if you were twenty minutes late you were sacked, and after that you'd be taken to court. Nearly every lunch break people would discuss someone who had been absent. But in the difficult time of the blockade there wasn't a case of a person who could still move not coming to work. No cases at all."

"So there was no need to issue orders?"

"No need whatever! And I'll never forget it. I saw that people were collapsing with hunger, and even more from cold, and I decided to make a *burzhuika*. We had a recreation room, and with the help of some workers I made one in there. We decided that after every half hour's work there'd be ten minutes to get warm. I later came to the conclusion that in that half an hour my workers did more than in two hours... A new factory manager was appointed. He began walking about in a military greatcoat. I didn't know he was the manager. He'd been into our shop once before that. He didn't say anything. Later on he came in and he said: 'Where are your people?' 'They're getting warm,' I told him. 'The front needs weapons, the job's got to be done, and your people are sitting around!' I told him: 'They're not, they're getting warm. They'll work better then.' So I was punished. A messenger came and brought me a reprimand. But two weeks later, when he'd got to know everything better, the manager came to me and apologised, and issued an order: make *burzhuikas* in all the shops! So that was that. Because my family lived nearby, you understand, I used to go home two or three times a week. It didn't take long to



dash over there—about five minutes. There were my two daughters and my wife. We lived here in No. 40. One daughter died. I buried her myself. Then my wife collapsed. They didn't put her in the local clinic but in the military hospital. So one daughter had died, and the other one, she was three, was the only one left at home. What could I do? I'd heat the old-fashioned stove (we didn't live in our room, but in the kitchen). I'd lay the little girl right on the stove range and cover her up, then run off to the factory. Later I'd come again. I'd feed her with some kind of slops so that she wouldn't die. So I kept running back and forth. I'd rush home, feed her and change her clothes, you see? And run off. She'd be left alone again. I thought she'd turn into a wild thing. Once I got home, opened the door, and saw her standing there—a tiny girl entirely on her own in the flat—everyone else had died.”

“What proportion of your workers died?”

“Most of them. Good, skilled people they were. Well, what could we do about it! Take, say, November-December 1941. Less than a half—no, a third, were left. If we take 1942, I can tell you straight, that in the whole factory there were about 1,500-2,000 left out of 8,000.”

“Did many of them go to the front?”

“Yes, very many went to the front.”

The places of those who went to the front were taken by adolescents and women. It was the same in all the factories. The city that halted the fascist armies at its walls, and was withstanding attack after attack, was continuing to supply its defenders with arms. Even the “Mainland”—the rest of the country that was neither under siege nor occupied—received Leningrad arms during those months that were so difficult for Moscow.

Now it seems unbelievable that children's hands, weak from hunger, should have lifted heavy blanks and fixed them on the machines.

"We tied ourselves to the machines... So that we wouldn't fall onto them. It wasn't just that we were afraid of falling, but we didn't want to fall onto the machine and be crippled," recalls *Mikhail Pelevin*, who worked at the Kulakov Plant as a fifteen-year-old. "They used us boys as auxiliary workers. They were thrifty with the metal and it wasn't always possible to trust us lads from the trade school with it. In those days there couldn't be any rejects. And, of course, when they did put one of us at a machine for a time, the chief commandment to us was not to hurry! "

It is no secret that such boys went to any length to get into the factory because, apart from anything else, in the factory canteen you could get three plates of hot yeast soup and a bottle of soya milk all at once in exchange for a coupon for half an ounce of groats. That milk had just begun to appear. It was devised right there in the blockaded city.

Another person we met was *Olga Melnikova-Pisarenko*. Her wartime (and postwar) fate was linked with the famous Road of Life across the ice of Lake Ladoga (more about that later). But her story also contained the following interlude:

"I shall never forget what I saw at the Kirov Works. I was there by chance. We had gone there to fetch firewood. There were a lot of wooden houses there, and we were taking wood to the military hospital. So I was there by chance. I looked, and I saw boys of 12 and 13 and girls of 14 standing working at machines. They had taken the places of their fathers and elder brothers. Benches or boxes had been put there for them so that they could reach the machines. It was said that one girl working on a lathe was still playing with dolls. That wasn't true. She had picked up the doll as she left for work. She felt she had to take with her something precious, that is, precious to her. She'd taken the doll with her because she was afraid to lose it."

"Was it because her house might be bombed?"

"Yes. She didn't play with it, it was simply a personal possession. As if there could be any question of playing with anything when she was short of food and drink, and she knew that she had to make a machine part. She took her doll with her to save it. Her home might be destroyed, but this thing that was dear to her would be saved."

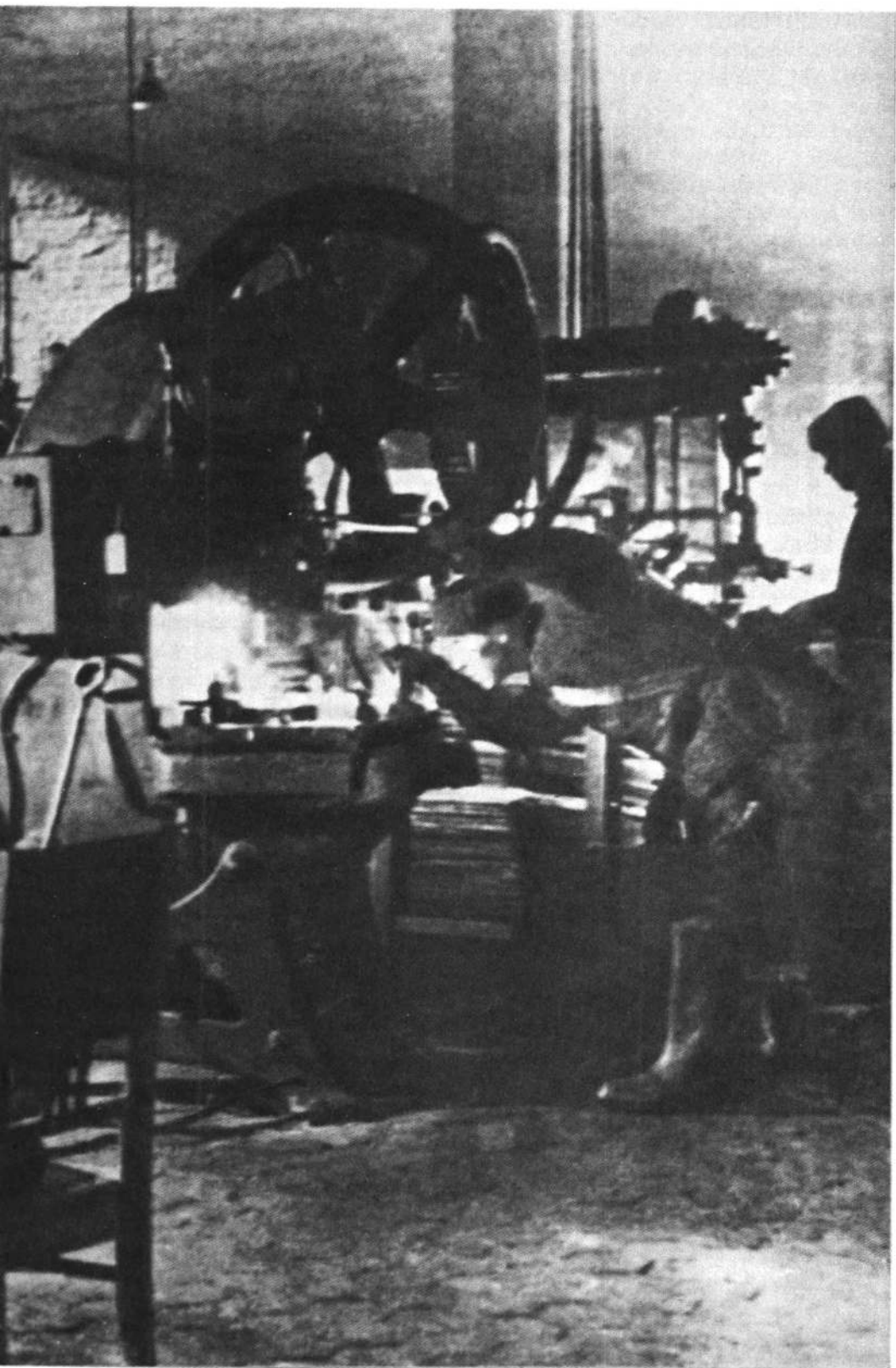
"How old were those girls?"

"Thirteen or fourteen... Another time you'd be hurrying somewhere and you'd see a youngster standing nearby. 'Why are you standing there?' you'd ask. 'Let's go, the shelling's over.' You'd go over to him and find he was dead! He'd died of hunger, of course. Died standing there, leaning against the wall! "

Here is the story told by *Pyotr Zenkov*, who had been a foreman at the Kirov Works:

"For 25 days I lay in the hospital... When I got better, I returned to the shop. The chief was Ivan Plotnikov. He's alive and well today. Plotnikov said to me: 'Zenkov, clear the snow near the shop. We've got to start work.' But who was there to do the work? I had one fitter, Manikin, and all the rest were women. The girls were 16 or 17, there were weak





ones, all kinds. None of them had any skills. I myself was foreman, setter, worker, everything under the sun! I sharpened drills, sharpened bits, put the bits into position and started up the machines. And Naryshkina was one of my workers, and she would look at me and burst into tears—why she was afraid of me I don't know, but she feared both the machine and me."

"One of the girls?"

"A woman, an elderly woman. Her husband was an old Bolshevik from before the revolution. He worked at the Zhdanov Plant. Well, I began to gather people, and I began to train them. Welding was an interesting thing. I'd never been a welder myself. But casting boxes had to be made. In present-day terms it would be a crime, but I made them of aluminium, so that ailing women could pick them up and it would be easier to turn out the mines. So we made aluminium boxes and put three mines in each. But one side kept sticking. It was a pity. One mine wouldn't come out, it stuck, and was a reject. I wondered and wondered what to do. Then I had an idea. I made a 5-mm washer on the outside and then tightened up a lock-nut from inside... It worked. My chief said: 'Smashing!' Three mines started coming out—it was great! So I made those aluminium casting boxes. And we cast the bushings there, and did it all with those women. Well, we machined all the parts ourselves. We did it on a vertical turning lathe. I found a discarded one and we installed it. That was the right thing to do. Mines were needed badly. We set up a good shelter too, and went there when firing was heavy.

"One day the firing was terrible. One of my workers was a Ukrainian woman, Kormilitsina by name. Her husband had worked at the Kirov Works. He had gone to the front and been killed. So they were firing, and I was fiddling about with the planing machine. I said to Kormilitsina: 'Would you go out and listen to find out where the shells are falling?' She went, then came back. 'Chi-i-ief! Behind the shaping shop.' No sooner had she spoken than a shell exploded just over my head. I was concussed. I didn't remember anything. I carried Kormilitsina, who was also wounded, right through the shop without realising I had a human being in my arms. And when I got to the casting boxes I bumped into them, and came to, and found I was carrying someone. We arrived. I was bleeding copiously and I thought, well, I've had it! But it seems it was not my fate to die. There was a lobby there with double doors leading to my office. I staggered about the lobby and thought—this is death now! An old lathe stood right by the door to my office and at that moment a shell burst against that heavy lathe. If I'd taken another two steps I really would have been dead! After that I sped off without being aware of what I was doing. I flew to the basement, to the first-aid post. My wife came, my brother hurried there, too. They were crying. I said: 'What are you crying for? I'm alive and kicking!' 'Off to the hospital!' 'I'm not going anywhere. There's no one to do the work, and it's got to be done. Who's going to do it all? I'm not going to hospital!' After that the Germans gave us a real going-over. I went outside and I saw planes. I counted them—there were seven or eight. Well, I thought, they're ours! And right then they started dropping bombs! My god! The ground was shaking under

my feet as I stood there. Everything was trembling. They dropped a lot of bombs on us then. Flattened one shop, literally flattened it out... And then—we had a chimney—a huge one. They really had a go at it! And we had furnaces right there.”

“Which shop was that?”

“The copper and iron foundry. They hit that chimney and damaged it. Made several holes in it. We had to get it down, otherwise it might have fallen and killed us. My workshop was right by, between the canteen and the copper foundry, and I was to be evacuated along with everyone else. We got the chimney down—it fell nearly, in one piece. They stopped going for it then. More people were killed at the plant than left it to fight at the front. I don’t know how I came out of it alive! We were absolutely starving. But I drank soya milk and ate oilseed meal. None of the others were drinking soya milk, but I drank it. I didn’t drink water. I drank soya milk and ate oilseed meal. Later they began to give us rations—500 grammes of bread. And then they gave rations to the workers and us. We got vodka, too. And there was beer, we got it on coupons, workers’ coupons. So things were getting better and better.”

Valentina Moroz, who was one of those very 14-year-old girls who had to work at the factories and in workshops not only in place of men but of skilled men, recalls that life as she saw it:

“My mother’s death had a very depressing effect on me. I could not bear to stay at home at all. I spent a few days at a neighbour’s and then I was taken to a factory, near where we lived, in the Petrogradskaya Storona. I got fixed up there and arranged to live in. It was a defence factory. Before the war it had made cash registers or some such thing. Then, during



the blockade, it was working on defence. The machines had been evacuated to Sverdlovsk, but some were still left. Well, I didn't know anything about anything when I went there. I became a trainee turner, because we had to master some skill very quickly. I was making those little, you know, cams. It's for when the stabiliser's welded onto the shell, little cams for that pointed part. We had to work with micrometers, and it was very painstaking and precise work. There wasn't anyone to take my place on the other shift. But somehow or other I managed it more or less, and so I worked on those cams..."

There was other work, too—collecting corpses, transporting them to trenches, and saving the city from epidemics. It was constant, daily work, that had even become "accustomed" work. All the same, it was a terrible thing to have to do.

In the blockade memory it is recorded along with the other concerns and jobs done by Leningraders. But when this record comes to light today, not only listeners and readers, but also those who speak or write of it, or recall it feel bad. The fact is that this work had to be done. What's more, often it had to be done by women, by women's hands!

"I was afraid of dead bodies, but I had to load those corpses. We used to sit right there on the lorries with the corpses, and off we'd go. And your heart would seem to switch off. Because we knew that today we were taking them, and tomorrow it would be our turn, perhaps.

"But, after all, some people would remain alive. We firmly believed that the Germans would not be able to take the city, not at any price" (*A. Arsenyeva*).

The heart "switched off"—that's not something you simply think up, you have to experience it. As did *Anna Petrova*, who worked on the trams (74 Basseinaya St.).

"...Later there was this work to be done. In 1942 we had to transport corpses that were the last of that hungry winter. They sent us to Marat Street—my local AA office. We travelled by tram. We picked the bodies up from various districts and places. And the people differed, too. In the Kirov district they were mostly men, big men, and with big bellies, and as we carried them on stretchers the water washed about inside them as if in a barrel. In the Nevsky district the majority were children and old people. We were told not to pick up bodies which couldn't be identified. Because of that the following occurred. It was Sunday. We were picking up bodies from the Bekhterev Hospital. There was only a watchman there. I told those working under me to hand over the number of corpses we had documents for. While I was doing the paper work with the watchman, my people managed to load the bodies. And then the watchman began to curse us, saying that we'd taken the wrong ones, and demanding that we unload them again. It appeared that their relatives might come for them...

"The girls refused to unload and the watchman himself got into the back of the lorry. He'd take off a corpse, bring it over his shoulder into the hospital morgue. Those bodies weren't yet stiff, they flopped in all directions, and that was how the watchman took his bodies back. We our-

selves had to take the stiff ones. The driver grumbled at me, saying: 'Don't touch the bodies, or I won't let you sit in the cab! '"

She spoke about this without squeamishness. It was work, and she had to do it under the circumstances. There was nothing she could do about it—someone had to do the job... You asked me to tell you everything, just the way it happened, was her attitude, and that was something that happened. We, too, must recount everything without shame, without affectation, rejecting any reproaches of naturalism or lack of aestheticism, recount it in such a way as to pay tribute to those who, like Anna Petrova, did this distressing work.

What complex functions were taken on by what might seem to have been the simplest of jobs, and what importance and actuality they acquired! That of the postwoman, for instance. We have already mentioned *Natalia Petrushina* (51/9 Bolshoi Prospekt), who despite her years (she was born in 1914) is still a very active woman. Think of her with her heavy postbag, which in the blockade felt far heavier than it would now and the distance from one block of flats to the next seemed far greater, the stairs far steeper. Then the letters were not only delivered to the flat, the postwomen tried to hand them personally to the addressee.

"Of course, I could hardly keep going myself. When the blockade began, we lived in Novaya Derevnnya, in a hostel. The nazis bombed the market—there were some important targets around that way—and our hostel was hit. Well, they moved us here, to Bolshoi Prospekt, No. 31. So we lived in this street. There were sixty of us. I was working for the 129th postal district. It was Kamenny Island. Well, some of our lot left the city, but most, of course, starved to death. My husband was killed by artillery fire at his factory. He went there and never came back. The children died during the war, too, both of them. Real hunger was setting in. From about the middle of December we didn't get anything at all on our ration cards."

"Did you carry on working?"

"I went on working. I was delivering letters on Academician Pavlov Street, and in that street was the Experimental Institute of Medicine, Vaccines and Serums. Whenever I went there—it was already after the hunger had started, the medical people there would explain to me: 'Don't ever, comrade postwoman, however bad you feel, take to your bed, try to keep working.'"

"The scientists told you that?"

"Yes. Professor Gurevich was there at the time (he got a lot of correspondence), and he told me: 'I'm leaving Leningrad, because they're making me do it. But I tell you—don't ever give up and go to bed when you feel bad. Don't get downhearted. Keep on your feet just as long as you possibly can.' Well, I heard the same warning from many people, and I didn't let myself get downhearted. As long as they brought the post to our district we delivered it, that was until the hard frosts came. And then we just didn't have any vans. So what we had to do was this: at four or five in the morning two or three of us would make our way to the main post office with sledges. Sometimes they wouldn't get any letters there for a week or two, and then it would all come through at once. Then we would gather it up into sacks and take it away. But how did we take it away?"

We'd give each other a helping hand and get it to our district in the space of a day. Our local post office wasn't heated very often, but it's true, they let us into the housing office, where there was always someone on duty, and they had some heating. (That was at No. 70/75.)"

"Do you remember how you took the letters to the houses?"

"We spent a day sorting the post, because there'd be as many as twenty letters to a communal flat. That needed sorting out. Can you imagine what the postbags were like? And the sorting? Our hands were cold, even though they were heating. One would sort, another would deliver. Oh, those staircases! It would take you a couple of hours or so, because when you got there it would be dark. It was dark on the staircase, and slippery, those who were able to, threw their slops out there; the toilets weren't working (there was no water), so the people threw everything down the stairs. Sometimes you'd be going up the stairs and you'd fall and slide down again, because it was slippery, especially when it was dark. Well, and you'd come to a flat. All the rooms would be open, the flat wasn't locked at all, it'd be dark and you'd stumble. Sometimes when you came you'd find someone lying there. You'd think—he's dead! You'd shake him a little and say: 'There's a letter for you.' If he was conscious, then of course he'd begin to stir. But others couldn't care whether there was a letter or not. Well, you'd start pestering them. If they asked you to, you'd read it to them. Sometimes you'd even read them a letter informing them that someone was missing or wounded, had been sent to hospital, and they wouldn't cry. 'Well,' they'd say, 'all right.' Another time you'd come to a flat and find someone lying dead on the bed... As you walked down the street, often you would not meet a single soul. And if someone was coming along, you couldn't make out whether it was a child, an old woman, a girl, or what! That was the state everybody was in.

"Two instances come to mind. A father was waiting for letters from his son. He went to the canteen for food. Well, and what food would he get there? Water and a couple of grains of something. And not always that. You'd queue up, and then you'd go away, because there hadn't even been enough of that to go round. When I arrived, he was sitting on the stairs. I addressed him by name (I've forgotten what it was now) and said: 'A letter for you!' 'Will you read it to me please?' I read it out. His son had written to say that they were engaged in fierce fighting, there had just been an offensive—and that was all. The man took the letter and thanked me. Then he said: 'You know what: Help me to stand up.' Just think of it! To stand up! A man having to ask that! But it was true, he was very thin. I began to help him up, and collapsed onto the stairs myself. We couldn't get up, neither he nor I. What a terrible thing! But another man appeared and he was a bit stronger, evidently, and so between us we got one another up. Then there was one more case: it was another letter I handed to a man on the way (in most cases it was like that), in Academician Pavlov Street. But he never read it. There was some firing and he was tossed aside by a wave. He was flung against a building. Some workers from the House of Young Pioneers happened to be there at the time, door-keepers, sweepers and so on, and they took him away. So the man never even had a chance to read his letter."

"Why did people ask you to read letters to them? Were they so weak?"

"They were weak, of course. Some couldn't even move a hand. Take that man sitting on the stairs. He has a string bag in his hand. He sat down and couldn't get up again. His fingers were already numb. And once a man can't move, it's all up with him."

"And were your children at home while you were out?"

"No. My son died at the beginning of the war. And my daughter at the end of November. We all kept going to the air raid shelter, she caught a cold, it turned to pneumonia and she died. And the other one, the little boy, was in a nursery, and was to have been evacuated with them, but he caught cold, and he also died as a result. So my two children died, almost within a year of each other, and my husband was killed by artillery fire at the factory... It would happen that you'd see a man sitting helplessly, and you couldn't help him, you just couldn't, because when you gave him your hand you'd sit down yourself. And wouldn't be able to get up again. There was no fear, nothing. Of course, we went to deliver the letters once a day. You'd get there somehow, and on the way back you'd feel as if you were travelling by sledge, the stairs were slippery, and you'd hang on to the banisters... You'd get to a flat, and there'd be no one there—they'd either moved into the factory, or had gone to relatives—it was a time when people gathered together. My height is 151 centimetres. Today I weigh 52 kilograms, but can you imagine what it was like when I weighed 36 kg? Later, when the spring came (it was an early spring, thank goodness) we went to Kamenny Island and there were lots of trees there. We'd go to a young tree, pull the little green leaves off and eat them. Then we'd stuff leaves into our postbags. When we'd delivered all the post we'd gather those leaves, and nettles and goosefoot. We'd get home, press the wet leaves together and put them on the *burzhuika*! We'd bake them and eat them. I used to get up at five so that I could get my 250 grammes of bread.

"Another time you'd be standing in the queue and someone a bit stronger than you, as they were weighing your bread, would grab it from behind, put it in his mouth and it was gone."

"Did that happen to you?"

"Several times—a stronger person, a man or woman who was stronger" (everyone seemed to her to be stronger than herself!). "People would be queueing. You wouldn't dream that the woman was after your bread. And she had a ration card. But there was such greed in her, such lack of concern for others, that she was only out for herself. The bread was like clay or earth. And a piece like that—250 grammes—a person could pop it straight into his mouth. The saleswoman wouldn't be able to do a thing about it. The person would come up—and the main thing it was done fast—snatch the bread and swallow it. You couldn't do a thing! Later I realised what had to be done—you'd stand there, and while they weighed your piece you shield it with your hands, like that!" (She made a tent-shape with her hands).

"As if it were a flame?"

"That's right."

That was the postwoman. Then there were the printers. They too acquired unexpected importance, even more so...

Eugeni Trenke (12 Martynov Embankment) worked at the Volodarsky Printing House, in the shop that printed the ration cards. All manner of thieves and fascist agents were, naturally enough, interested in that department. They tried to disorganise the work of the shop and to find out what kind of cards would be issued the following month. At the printers the colour and size of the cards kept being changed.

"At the end of the month we would get instructions that the colour was to be such and such and the size so and so. We had to print the cards in six days, working round the clock and not leaving the printers. It was like printing money. Strict account was kept and special paper used. There was a ration card office in every district. They had a day or two to take the cards from us, to be strictly accounted for. And then had a couple of days to distribute the cards. It was all done to make sure there was no time to prepare forged cards."

How did they fare, those who printed the ration cards for Leningrad? They got on the same as everyone else. They went hungry. Trenke himself—and his family—starved. His 15-year-old son and then his wife died at the beginning of 1942.

People worked, and their work was vitally important. Even though at times people could only dimly perceive its connection with the destinies of the war, the city and other people.

But there was one kind of work which was done by people who knew very well that the lives of Leningraders depended on them. Despite all the difficulties, what they accomplished enabled thousands and thousands of people to survive the agonies of those blockade years...

These were the bakers, the bakers of bread.

We arrived at *Nikolai Loboda's* flat at dinner time (4 Novosibirskaya St.). His wife Vera agreed with us that work came first and hospitality later, and she willingly, even cheerfully, told us about the blockade, about herself and about her schooldays of that period. Her husband sat looking gloomy and, we thought, reserved. "Well, we won't get much out of that one," was our professional reaction. So, it seems, we might have gone away were it not for our seeing an old newspaper among the piles of family documents which reported the feat of Loboda, who got a hot oven repaired, as a result of which the bakery was able to supply bread by morning. To supply bread to Leningrad.

For the first time Vera's husband smiled, in a guilty kind of way, and got busy seating us at the dinner table with a view to diverting attention from himself.

Nevertheless, we succeeded in taking down his story. By trade Nikolai Loboda was a sailor, a mechanic.

"It was the first month of the war. So what should I do? I went to the bakery. There was no one there, no manager, and the main thing—no chief electrician. The chief mechanic, Mikhailov (he's on pension now) had been called up a month before the war, and I was doing the chief mechanic's job. We were baking round loaves. A month passed, we were in September, and short of flour. They said we should go over to baking loaves in tin forms, or else close the bakery."

"Why was that?"



*Vera Loboda (extreme right in the upper row)
and her relatives, 1936.*

“The difference between round loaves and tin loaves lies in the quantity of the final product because all sorts of other things can be added to the flour. If you’re baking in a tin you can add water, whatever you like, but with a round loaf—it goes straight onto the hearth—you can’t do that, because it’ll spread out and lose its shape... We had a manager called Smirnov and the director at the time was Mochalovsky (he’s no longer alive). They summoned me and said: ‘It’s like this, we want you to come with us to the city executive committee.’ ‘All right, let’s go.’ We arrived. Popkov and Kuznetsov said: ‘Comrades! We’ve got to have tin loaves, with additives, instead of round loaves’ (cellulose was added). ‘But we’re producing round loaves.’ ‘And how long will it take you to get ready to make the other kind? There, we’ll give you twenty days—think it over and report back!’ We went back to the bakery, and I sized things up. There were no materials, nothing to do anything with. I said: ‘So it’s like this: I need a 200 mm strip of any thickness, so that the baking sheets can be thrown out and tins put in 13 at a time—a baker’s dozen’ (as it’s still called today). So I wrote down what I needed as regards both time and people. They gave me 10 people from the Vulcan Works and we converted the ovens in seven days. As far as materials were concerned, there was some kind of warehouse on Kamenny Island, and they gave me a pass to it. I went there with lorries and loaded up first one, then a second. When I turned up with a third, two comrades in civilian clothes appeared and asked: ‘Who gave you permission to take stuff from here?’ I told them: ‘I’ve got a piece of paper that says I can.’ ‘Only Moscow can give permis-

sion for that.' 'I don't know about that,' I said. 'This is what I've got.' They put me in a car and took me to the 'Big House.' There, it seems, they got on to someone by phone, then apologised. When the first tin loaves were baked, I can tell you, you could take them in your hand like that and squeeze them. It was half water. And that was what we had 125 grammes of! And nothing besides... When the bombing started, we were short of water. So we built a pumping station on the Malaya Nevka River (it was already December) and ran a power line there. But there weren't any pipes. What could we do? We took some fire hoses and connected them to serve as a pipe. Then we began having very severe frosts. In another two or three days the hoses would be frozen right through. So we wrapped them up in insulating material. At first, when the water was turned off we had tried to bring it in buckets from the Neva to the sixth floor."

So they laboured to carry by hand water for a whole bakery. Up the stairs to the sixth floor! And we know what the health and strength of those people were like then.

"Next door was the Kalinin Sawmills. There was no electricity. We had a little generating station of our own but it was not enough to keep us going. But in the grounds of the sawmills there were an immense number of logs which were cut up into boards, and a lot of scrap. Over a period of three months they burnt those logs and supplied us with electricity. At first we built the pumping station on the ice but afterwards, when the city started up the water supply the sawmills provided us with electricity. We ran a cable from there, but vehicles kept travelling past and cutting the cable. That was bad enough but then a tank passed that way and chopped it in two. After that we were obliged to raise the cable to a height of two and a half metres, so that it would be above all these things. That was how we carried on until May. We began to get more stable electricity supplies from Volkhov, but we had nothing to heat the ovens with. Then they began to pull down wooden houses on Kamenny Island, and they told us we could have ten of them. Everything was in them still—furniture, clothes, everything. We dismantled them during the day, of course. Those who worked in the evening came out in the daytime, and so did those on the night shift.

"A military unit gave us two Stalinets tractors. We'd pass a steel hawser over the top of the house (all the houses over there were wooden of one or two storeys) and pull it apart. The unit also gave us three lorries. These carried the firewood to the bakery so that we could heat the ovens and bake bread. And we gave a metre of wood to everyone who helped demolish the houses (there was nothing to heat people's flats, either). Once a woman worker was careless and the oven was jammed. I roughly estimated that the tins with the loaves were seven metres from the place where the loading mechanism was. I measured it and I said: 'Hammer away!' So they hammered away making a hole big enough for a man to get through. But the temperature was 240° C. We put the furnace out, right out. First we poured water into the oven, and then brought the temperature down. It was probably about 160°-180° by this time. I wrapped up my head, soaked my padded jacket and trousers, my felt

boots and my two mittens. Then I crawled in. The first time I couldn't manage it. I felt faint. So I came out, sat down for about ten minutes and then had another go. That time I got everything out. I said: 'Well, you can fill up the hole now.' We got cracking. We had a break of two hours or so in our work, and then got the oven into commission again, that is, we didn't interrupt bread supplies. I was given an award by the government for that—the Order of the Red Banner of Labour...”

WHAT COULD BE DONE

Snow-blanketed streets, piled with fragments of bombed houses. Snow—virginal, incredibly white for the city, or dusted with a thick layer of soot from the many fires.

Pathways trodden between the snowdrifts, between ice-bound trolley-buses, to houses, ice holes, shops, pathways across the Neva, across squares, to the offices of district Party committees and district Soviets. The pavements were heaped with snow, people were walking in the middle of the roadway. The windows were broken, and boarded up with plywood, stuffed up with cushions, mattresses, and everywhere the flue pipes of the *burzhuikas*.

On screens protecting shop windows from shell splinters and shrapnel notices were put up: “Coffin for sale”, “I make temporary stoves”, “One cubic metre of firewood in exchange for some millet”... The advertisements of those days were extraordinary social documents. They are preserved only in rare, chance photographs and in some people's memories, and then not precisely. And there is no way of reproducing the astounding testimony their texts represent.

Leningrad courtyards, Leningrad staircases...

Canteens, where silent queues of people moved with saucepans and other containers.

One could continue without end to draw eloquent, striking pictures of devastation, of the hungry life of the besieged Leningraders, pictures of a frozen, paralysed, weary city.

It is harder to see beyond these to the iron determination—the energetic, purposeful activity that maintained the city's life in those terrible conditions. Someone had to distribute the pitiful amount of electricity available, to allocate tasks to factories, to seek out raw materials. Dead bodies had to be cleared away and buried, emergency hospitals had to be set up, Komsomol squads formed to cope with the difficulties of everyday life under siege, and girls recruited for the local outposts of the city AA defence organisation.

Nothing just happened of its own accord. Take those temporary stoves. Arrangements had to be made for their production by local industry, iron sheeting had to be found or metal rolled specially, and for that electricity had to be allocated to the metal workshops concerned... Public baths were opened. But for that they had to be allocated coal, and that coal had to be

brought from outside the city... All these were well-nigh insoluble problems, demanding, above all, immense effort on the part of the organisers.

As early as January 1942 the bureau of the Leningrad city Party committee demanded that executive committees of local Soviets warm up the frozen water mains and in accordance with a schedule laid down start supplying water to top floors of buildings in order to wash out the sewage system. Paraffin and petrol were provided to thaw out the pipes. To do this, blow-lamps had to be made available to house superintendents. Here, the bureau of the city Party committee intervened, since the production of 500 blow-lamps was a formidable problem in blockade conditions.

The resolutions and decisions of those months, harsh and uncompromising, at times seem unreal (and at that period—altogether beyond anyone's powers). Yet they were carried out and in the majority of cases within the prescribed time limits, without excuses and references to the difficult circumstances. Without reference to the shelling, the deaths of those who were to carry them out, the conflagrations and the lack of materials. There were plenty of reasons, but it was not the reasons that decided the outcome but the insistent need—the carrying out of every order saved people's lives, saved the city.

The district Party committees and the district Soviet executive committees were working in conditions that were unaccustomed, not to say incredible. The city was the same city as before, with the same districts, the same neighbourhoods, the same blocks of flats, the same offices, the same warehouses, pavements, schools, shops. But it was no longer a question of the needs of a district, of plans for improving the quality of everyday life, of repairs and decoration, but of the life and death of the city's people.

It was the first time such a grave responsibility had lain upon the shoulders of workers for the Party and the Soviets.

The possibilities available to them were constantly diminishing. There was no transport, the front had taken the doctors, the militiamen and the building workers—all physically strong men, and anyway they had all been eager to get to the front themselves. Dystrophy, the result of starvation, had carried off others. Hunger did not discriminate between professions—it cut down the foundryman, the lawyer, the plumber and the composer alike.

The number of places in hospitals was limited. Sometimes it was the secretary of the district Party committee that allocated these live-saving places. But before that the hospitals themselves had to be organised. Heating, food and care had to be provided for.

Then there was the organisation of evacuation, with its countless difficulties of delivering people and their belongings, and of registration. Some people had to be persuaded to go, others helped. An orderly system of priorities had to be established, children had to be collected and people appointed to accompany them.

Every day each of the city's districts had to cope with a host of such problems, among which, it appeared, there were no minor ones. They cannot be listed or their living details recreated. What we have managed to collect are only isolated cases, by no means giving a complete picture, yet giving an idea of that work.

Sergei Gasteyev was one of those district leaders directly concerned with all those problems. He was head of the housing department of the Lenin district, deputy chairman of the executive committee. This is what he has to say of those wooden houses handed over to be demolished for firewood. People had to be moved out of them into houses in their own district, and to do that other accommodation had to be found, the necessary documents made out, and an official re-registration carried out.

"In the space of two or three days, I recall, I had to allocate almost 50 houses for demolition to military hospitals and nursery schools, and what was left to canteens, baths and laundries. Fuel was desperately needed, and there was no fuel whatever. We were burning chairs. I myself saw people burning the lids of upright and grand pianos after bombing... You'd go into a flat and it would be empty, there'd be nothing to sit on. That was why there was a very strict order from the city executive committee—wooden houses must be broken up urgently. 'Provide fuel!' People were freezing. The nazis would bomb a block of flats or it would be damaged by shellfire, and everything would be open. The windows would be broken, there'd be no plywood to board them up, and people would go to another district, to relatives or friends. The flats would remain empty. As soon as there was a hit, all the glass was shattered. People ran, because of the appalling cold. Where they were running to nobody knew. Afterwards a search would be made for them. After bombing it was my job to find housing for those who remained among the living. I'd summon a number of heads of housing offices located near the bombed houses, and ask: 'What rooms or flats have you got free?' Then I'd immediately move people according to the list. There was no question of official documents here. People were standing in the street, shivering, with nowhere to warm themselves. That was my province—bomb and gas shelters, flats, moving people and the demolition of wooden houses. I was given, for example, for a district near the Kirov Works, a hundred wooden houses (Pravaya Tentelevka, Levaya Tentelevka and other streets), and I had to transfer the people in that area to other accommodation as quickly as possible."

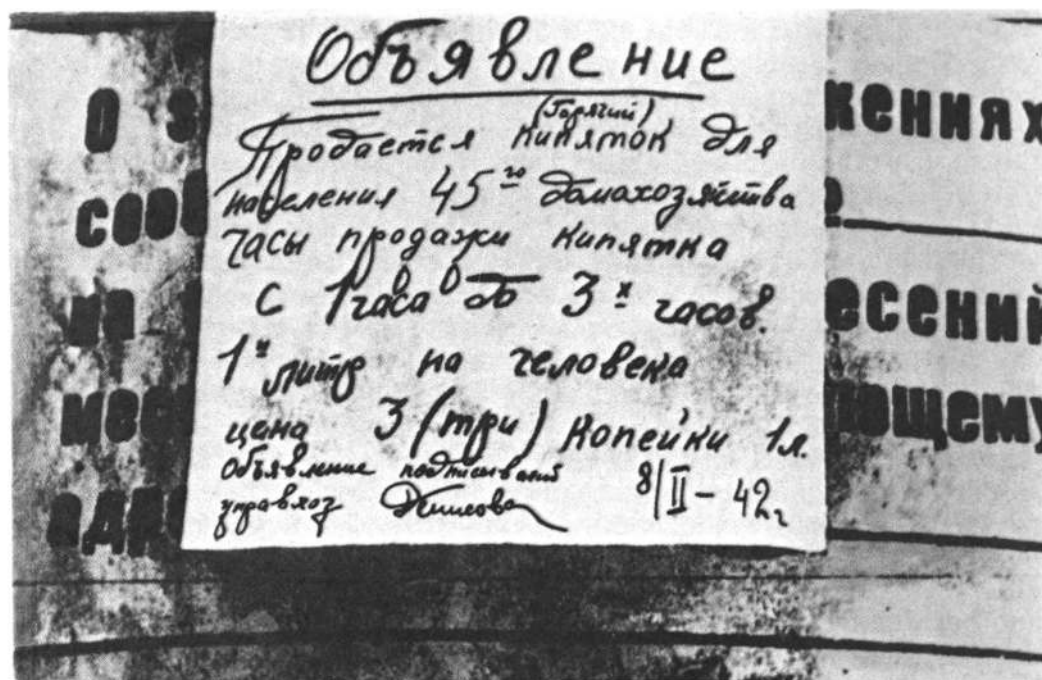
"How did they manage about moving their belongings?"

"On sledges, of course. There was also a resolution of the city executive committee that storage space had to be found and before a house was demolished a list had to be drawn up of the things belonging to people who were absent. Their things were stored according to the list... The managers of the stores had to keep the furniture and things from particular houses and flats separately... Only after this might a house be demolished."

It is difficult to imagine how people could contrive to observe this troublesome legal procedure in all parts of the city.

The account of *Alexander Tikhonov*, chairman of the Vyborg district Soviet, repeats the same story.

"The initials SD were chalked on all the wooden houses to be dismantled—they stood for the words 'subject to demolition'... Many people did not want to move elsewhere, especially those who had a scrap of land by the house. This was the kind of thing that happened: a house was in process of demolition, but an old woman would be sitting there, unwilling



*The notice says. "Attention!
Boiling water for residents of the 45th housing estate.
On sale from 1 to 3 p.m.
One litre per person at the price of 3 kopecks a litre.
Signed by housing office manager Denisov. 8.2.42."*

to leave: 'I'm not going anywhere.' People tried to persuade her, saying: 'But all the same it's got to be done. You yourself will die here without fuel, and other people will die...' Some people who were moved were later bombed out and had to move again.

"There was another difficult task. We had, for instance, the House of Specialists. There, as everywhere else, inventories were made of the belongings of all evacuees. We ourselves listed the possessions they had left behind and put them in store at the Krasnaya Zarya (Red Dawn) Factory. We had no vehicles whatever. Nowadays you can say: 'Prepare twenty lorries.' Then people were weak, and it was a terrible job to try with their help to take valuable possessions to the stores. The things were kept in those stores for a long time after that and special heating was installed, storekeepers were recruited and wages paid for looking after the belongings of citizens. It may seem somewhat fantastic. The city was under siege, the Germans were firing at it—and at that moment the district Party committee and the district Soviet's executive committee were not only concerned about the preservation of state property but also about the possessions of citizens who had gone away. They were also making sure that homes were not ruined after bombing—they boarded up windows and nailed up doors.

"When the blockade was lifted, this is the kind of thing that happened. A citizen would write: 'Please send me an account of how my flat has sur-

vived.' They wrote from Central Asia, from Sverdlovsk, and all the letters were sent to the district Soviet's executive committee. They had to be answered. We set up special groups of deputies and activists, who went to the stores, and to the flats in question if things had been left there, and wrote replies."

The wooden houses that were burnt to feed boilers, *burzhuikas*, and other stoves, could not provide warmth for everyone.

"We could not provide firewood for everybody," says *Alexander Borisov* (84 Nevsky Prospekt), "but anyone who came got a little. We were allocated wooden buildings in Novaya Derevnja. In many houses it remained cold despite everything. Take Rubinstein Street—there was No. 17, a big block of flats where as many as 5,000 people were living. You'd go into a flat and the people would be half-alive. Some would be lying down, others wandering about. Mothers would die, leaving children. Terrible things happened. As leaders of the district executive committee we had to go round the blocks of flats."

When the war started Alexander Borisov was deputy chairman of the executive committee of the Kuibyshev district, one of the central parts of the city. After the war he suffered a terrible misfortune—he has been blind for many years now. From the apparently easy way this man bears his sad affliction, trying not to worry those near to him, one can guess what he was like there in his stricken district of Leningrad, how many people's troubles he took upon his own shoulders. These days he sometimes visits the Piskarevsky Cemetery. He listens to the eternal music there and the quiet behind it, the tranquillity of that green memorial, and he sees again...

"I can only recreate in my mind what I have seen myself. Not the present-day cemetery, in its now ennobled state, especially where the Motherland memorial stands. I see it at the time of those corpses, that trench about 100 metres long! They laid thousands of bodies there and used tractors, spades, anything to get them covered over. We were afraid there'd be epidemics in the spring, but this did not happen because to a certain extent we managed to observe sanitary requirements."

Preserved in his memory today are a great many things, not only at the level of his own home or his factory, but at district level, and that district, in population and area, was a whole town.

"I had to make a check of one bakery. The people there seemed to be fully supplied with bread, yet a large percentage were not turning up for work because they were suffering from scurvy. What was it that saved them? Pine needle infusions. They helped a lot. In the early days when we began to go hungry, we saw people going about carrying pine branches. What was the idea? It turned out that they made infusions with the needles and drank them... And I must say that our district, where most of the residents were office workers and the like, was the hungriest district—people got 150 grammes of bread. Well, of course, it wasn't the kind of bread we eat today... In the mornings we went round the district without fail. As we went we saw bodies that had been abandoned. You could not tell where they came from. It was a way of keeping the living provided for—they did not register deaths so they could keep the ration cards...

If you came along and asked when did so-and-so die, they would not tell you it was two weeks ago but today or yesterday."

"Did you withdraw the ration cards in such cases?"

"No, we left them."

"What were you able to do in such a flat?"

"We helped some people. We often managed to save people who were in some way connected with production, with some institutions. But in most cases we could only gather up the corpses. There were piles of bodies outside the Kuibyshev Hospital. Bodies were concentrated at other points too so that they could be transported to the cemetery later on. Special vehicles were allocated—they went round every day picking up bodies and taking them to the cemetery... A lot of people from our district were buried at the Piskarevsky Cemetery. Trenches were dug. We had tractors, and we mobilised people from district organisations. We collected about 200 people and sent them there to dig trenches and bury the bodies. It was a dreadful scene. There were bodies everywhere you looked. Especially at the Bogoslovsky and Piskarevsky cemeteries. There were all kinds of bodies—children and old people, some in a sitting position, others with arms upraised, and still others with legs bent..."

In winter the burial of the dead became a problem of virtually the highest magnitude. There was the risk of epidemics which would kill the living if the frosts suddenly came to an end.

"When the death toll rose sharply," Alexander Tikhonov continued, "they allocated the cemeteries to city districts. We were allocated the Piskarevsky (it was beyond the wood here). We dug trenches there, using the labour of the people of our district. Bodies were lying about in the streets. The district was divided up into micro-districts, and to each one a team of activists from the district executive committee was assigned. Burial offices were set up. We kept account—we had to give a daily report to the city Party committee, stating how many trenches we had dug, and how many bodies we had buried. The maximum number of burials we carried out was two thousand... Well, the mass burials continued for a couple of months, and then by spring the figures began to drop.

"I was at the cemetery four times a day. I began my working day with a visit to the cemetery and finished it with another..."

The city's scientists were trying to find ways of producing valuable substitute foods to help the population somehow. Each district was trying to play its part in this; some were finding raw materials at their factories and putting forward proposals for possible equipment.

The Vyborg district Party committee headed by Kedrov, the secretary, organised the production of protein yeast from wood. This yeast, which was well known during the blockade, probably saved a great many people, having been given out as supplementary food. Many of the stories told us featured plates of soup made from protein yeast. But neither the storytellers nor we ourselves had ever asked where the yeast had come from. As it happens, the name of a renowned Leningrad scientist, Vasily Sharkov, was linked with this yeast. He not only devised the technology of its production, he proposed the use of hydrocellulose meal as an admixture. He got the production of this edible cellulose going, and by mid-November

it began arriving at the bakeries. Hydrocellulose contained no nourishment, but it increased weight and made it possible to give the population the established ration of bread, made it porous and more edible.

Vasily Sharkov, a Doctor of Technical Sciences, was one of those scientists whose knowledge saved the lives of hundreds of thousands of his starving fellow townspeople. Altogether 18 yeast factories were established, some of them in the Vyborg district:

"The industry of our district provided everything. It was decided who should make such and such a part for a machine, who should do the body, who the container, who should get hold of a motor and who should overhaul it. All organisations played their part as members of a team. Shops were rapidly put into commission. Productivity (in tons) was high. We used birch wood."

On the spot, at the factory, and later at some bakeries, they started squeezing vitamins from pine needles making pine extract.

"Some people came of their own accord and asked: 'How can I help to solve this problem?' The sense of fellowship, of standing shoulder to shoulder, was extraordinarily strong, perhaps stronger than the feeling of individual need, of the empty stomach.

"The question of how to provide heating was a desperate one. Members of the executive committee were assigned to set up heated tea rooms, so that enfeebled people who had no heating at home could sit and drink hot water. Boilers were installed, and the janitors kept them going—they were supplied with fuel for the purpose. The Komsomol squads helped to take boiling water round to those who were too weak to come down from upper floors. Some deputies to the local Soviet were given responsibility



for a number of flats. They took round the bread rations to those who were too weak to go for them themselves. In the tea rooms talks were given on the situation at the front.

"We also managed to put the *burzhuika* into production for the public; we organised deliveries of firewood and set up stores."

There was practically nothing that the district committees did not turn their hands to. For instance, in winter 1942 trams started running across the Lenin district, and S. M. Gasteyev recalls:

"All the rails were iced up. But it was decided to get the trams going in time for New Year 1943. My job was to clear the sector from Narvskie Gates to Kalinkin Bridge. They assigned me a hundred women from the Krasny Treugolnik Plant. We worked right through the night, until we'd finished. We used crowbars, picks and spades..."

The leading figures in the district had to be wherever things were especially difficult, where the shelling was, where fires were raging, bombs dropping, or pipes bursting, everywhere where people had to be mobilised, where something had happened... Because of this they still have memories of many extraordinary, historically impressive events. Here is Alexander Borisov's recollection of the bombing of the Gostiny Dvor:

"There was a small furrier's in the Gostiny Dvor. The women used to take their children to work with them, it was mainly women working there. The alarm went, some ran to the shelter, others stayed on the job. The building was demolished, and a little girl and her mother were trapped in a space between safes. And it was the daughter who comforted the mother. She was only seven. 'They'll rescue us, Mummy,' she said, supporting her mother. Later, when we got them out, the mother said: 'There's my little saviour.' Another woman was caught between a beam and the brickwork. She was so tightly wedged in by the beam that she couldn't move a muscle. We got her out very slowly, because if we'd moved the obstruction hastily we could have made the whole wall collapse. It took three whole days to get the bricks off her. Her husband came and stayed by her side all the time. She had only one thought in her head—would we be able to save her or not? We talked to her through a crack, and she told us that death was all around her and that probably she would never get out. All the same, we rescued her..."

Anatoli Dubrovsky was a political instructor at the Dzerzhinsky district Party committee at the start of the war.

He had been trying to find his way in life through Komsomol work, through sport and through study, and when the war began he returned immediately from Kaunas to Leningrad, where they sent him to work at the district Party committee. He went out straightaway to work on the defences—in those early days, the first weeks of the war the erection of a defence line was the main concern of both the district Party committees and the district Soviets. It was essential "to provide daily up to 500,000 people to work on defence fortifications".

Everything was being done for the first time, and everything was unexpected and difficult—not only for the young and inexperienced, such as Dubrovsky. No one had experience of such a war, such ordeals and difficulties. But there was immense selflessness, devotion to duty. Leningrad's

first defence line was erected beyond Novgorod. That was where the city inhabitants got their baptism of fire. One of the participants in the difficult work of organising the public for repulsing the enemy, Dubrovsky is visibly moved today when he recalls his first task as a political instructor. His stories of the bombing Leningraders had to endure while digging the trenches, and about the wounded who had to be evacuated to Leningrad, include such pictures:

"The train near Shimsk was carrying horses, and there were petrol tanks right near. Bombs were falling onto the petrol tanks and onto the train itself, the train caught fire and I remember how the burning horses jumped from the trucks and ran—they ran away, burning..."

The war immediately set hearts on fire, but the circumstances called for cool-headedness and constant, daily, intensive effort. In October, Dubrovsky recalls, a 250 kilogram bomb hit the building of the Dzerzhinsky Party committee and sliced right through it. He could well remember a red column of dust... He also remembers with particular clarity and human grief that day when three of his fellow instructors were killed (he was already head of the organising instructors' department of the district Party committee).

"Those women—the three of them—went out early in the morning to enterprises they were responsible for... By that time it wasn't enough for the Germans to hurl high-explosive and incendiary bombs at us, they had to attack us with shrapnel shells too. So they would break as many windows as they could. Do you realise what it's like—winter-time, frost, and a home without windows? With one of those shrapnel shells they got hit, all three at once. The women were walking down Chaikovsky Street, where we used to have the 17th fire station and the military registration office, and that's where they were killed, Paramonova, Pozdnyak, and the third was a new instructor whose name I don't remember..."*

It was not an easy thing for each individual, whatever his post, to share and to bear the burden of the blockaded Leningrader. But if you managed to help, today you remember it, and do so with pride!

"At that time the district Party Committee had nothing. I'm speaking of provisions. The Party workers were in no different position from the employees of other organisations or those people who had remained in the city that first winter to look after evacuated apartments or had simply not gone. This meant that I couldn't, for example, give anyone any direct help in this sphere. The only thing was... They gave us this yeast soup, and sometimes the secretary of a Party committee would be in our office and you'd know he was starving, and there you were, with this so-called canteen, and so, well, you'd say to him: 'Come along.' But there wasn't anything else. Both for ourselves and for others we had this rule: 'Don't take to your bed. However difficult it is, don't take to your bed!' Because we'd seen in practice that when a weakened person succumbed and lay down, in the majority of cases he didn't get up again... Well, things got a bit better, and the food situation eased a little when the Road of

* Dr. B. Prusov wrote to tell us that there is an inaccuracy in Anatoli Dubrovsky's account: one of the three—Pozdnyak—was wounded, but survived.

Life was opened up across Lake Ladoga. And especially when we started distributing small plots in the spring. To begin with we started taking people out, you might say, to grass. There they crawled about and picked and ate grasses and herbs that were edible and others that were not. Later on, when they grew a little stronger, they began to dig vegetable plots and start growing things. Every organisation had its allotments.

"As regards the district Party committee, we had some plots in the Mikhailovsky Garden, and we tried to look after them. We did our best to sow crops that would bring the quickest return."

"The men were involved, too?"

"Everybody, everybody! From the first secretary to the office girl. Everyone dug, everyone sowed and everyone tended the plots... On the whole, we put a great deal of effort into cucumbers. Some people were lucky with them, others' efforts came to nothing much. Their cucumbers were scorched up or didn't form at all. Well, so then we shared them all out... Most organisations had been moved outside the district and cultivated plots in the places they were given. Subsequently the allotments were like large, well-organised vegetable gardens, with surprisingly good yields. We even mounted an exhibition of the produce. Many people today might envy what we grew then. Because people who were starving began to understand what to grow and how, and what to eat with what. They looked after those plots as if they were their own children..."

Workers for district Party committees, district Soviets and all organisations with responsibilities for running the life of the besieged city were themselves operating in conditions which ruled out any activity for the sake of form, for the look of the thing.

Strength, energy, intellect, emotions and conscience were all directed to the most vital things, which could not be pushed aside, without which there would be no bread in the shops next day, thousands would freeze to death and epidemics would rage...

In the stores of vegetables it had proved possible to build up for Leningraders, dangerous fungi had been spreading. Everyone knew that the blight would not only consume potatoes but thousands upon thousands of human lives if urgent measures were not carried out at city level... It is the disease of *phytophthora*, which appears on the 15th day after the potatoes are lifted: rot sets in, the potatoes "weep" and become damp, so that it is no longer possible to store them, how ever hard you try.

A tall, already grey-haired man—*Stanislav Przhevalsky*,* who was head of the Leningrad fruit and vegetable supplies administration before the war and during the blockade years, told us about his field of work, about the employees of his institution and of his "product", with just as much emotion as any general speaking of his victories and defeats. And it is not to be wondered at. A great deal depended on whether his people saved the weeping potato or not, whether they were able to make use of it or destroyed it. Everybody understood this in blockaded Leningrad, along

* Stanislav Przhevalsky died in 1977—before his story was published.

the entire Leningrad Front, and the decision was taken with a great sense of responsibility and at top level.

"I reported to the Smolny... Popkov and Lazutin came with me to the stores. I dug up a sample pile for them and said they should come back in a week's time and see what had happened. They did, and what did they see? Potatoes we'd put away in a good state, now were rotten. Then they were convinced that the potatoes had to be eaten quickly. A decision was taken by the Military Council—to ban the consumption of cereals."

"For how long?"

"For a specified period—and also to put all the potatoes into circulation straightaway. That way we didn't let a single gramme of potato spoil. They were all used up, but in a very short space of time. In this case potatoes were a substitute for cereal. The vegetables were eaten up."

"But was the entire potato crop that arrived in Leningrad in 1942 infected?"

"All of it, absolutely all of it. What a tragedy it was! We couldn't store them till winter, we'd eaten them all by then. If we'd kept them that long we'd have thrown away the whole of the stocks."

Another deadly enemy arrived in that bombarded, hungry, freezing city—scurvy, and battle had to be joined with it. *Alexei Bezzubov*, at the time head of the chemical technology department of the Vitamin Institute, recounted how they had drawn up scientific recommendations for the "extraction of vitamin C from pine". We have already spoken of this.

But the instructions "for obtaining an anti-scurvy pine infusion in industrial and domestic conditions" still had to be implemented, and equipment had to be obtained or adapted for the purpose. This life-saving elixir had to be prepared for several million civilian residents and soldiers. And people had to get out to the forests, and the pine needles had to be brought into Leningrad... Try to imagine all the difficulties involved in such conditions in what might seem a very simple matter—to prepare pine infusion—and then you'll understand why Stanislav Przhhevsky refers to the work done by scientists, local leaders and Leningrad women as an epic!

"Yet this epic hasn't been written down anywhere. It is just mentioned in literature that there was this pine tea... There were tears in plenty, the women would return with blistered heels... I can tell you how it was done. It was at No. 5 Degtyarny Lane. We had a small place there for processing fruit and vegetables, and that's where we organised the production of that pine infusion. We used our shredding machines."

"The ones you shredded cabbage with?"

"That's it. We used them to chop up the pine needles. But before we could make the infusion, we had to get the pine needles, and it took quite a time. Our supplies came from Pargolovo forest, and they were obtained by the employees of our loading and unloading office, who were all women."

"Couldn't you use needles from other trees?"

"No, only from pine. So every day a group of women, hungry women, walked to Pargolovo, to the forest. Later we managed somehow or other to get horses to bring the supplies back (we weren't supplied with any vehicles)."

"But to begin with the women just carried them?"

"Yes, on their own backs, without horses, even. They went from the Kalinin district office, from Piskarevka—it was about 16 kilometres to walk."

"They had to struggle back carrying the pine needles for a distance of 16 kilometres at first?"

"Yes, they carried it themselves. Then we managed to get horses to transport it (we had horses at Piskarevsky base and they delivered it to No. 5 Degtyarny Lane). There it was chopped up and vinegar was added. That infusion was filtered. And I must say, we made the infusion in such quantities that we satisfied the demand from all the hospitals and canteens. More than that—we even organised the production of packets of pine needles for the civilian population, with instructions on how to make the infusion. We took the needles off the branches, put them in packets and added instructions. If I remember right, we supplied somewhere around 200,000 doses a day to the pharmacies. And we kept the supplies flowing in every day, without a break. So, as the doctors told me later, we didn't have scurvy in the form they had expected it. That's pine for you! The difficulties in preparing it were tremendous... Well, the Military Council helped us: despite everything we were able to give those women third category army rations, so that they were on a par with soldiers (not frontline troops but those in the rear). That was of some help in making it possible for us to obtain pine needles..."

"Did you infuse it in barrels?"

"We did."

"How long did you have to keep it?"

"Well, if we infused it in the morning, by evening it was already in the hospital. People used to come to us from there, stand in the queue, collect the infusion and use it straightaway."

And so it went on, in big things and small. Incidentally, a thing could not be called small if the lives of so many people hinged upon it. When we remember and talk about the legendary Road of Life, about pine infusion, about fuel and water, the burial of corpses, the clinics, the help given by people in the local anti-aircraft defence organisation or the Komsomol squads concerned with everyday living conditions to starving people confined to their homes—behind all this we see and feel the complexity of the organisational work involved.

"The Whole Country Is Helping Leningrad!" was a slogan of those times—and this really was the case, despite the deadly ring of the blockade. Thousands and thousands of people outside that ring took part. Here is a typical example from the story told by Stanislav Przhevalsky:

"Did vegetables come by the Road of Life?"

"Yes, in large quantities. In those years the north-east districts gave us large quantities of dried potatoes. What did we do? Even though the north-east districts were without roads—it's only today that it's possible to speak of any kind of journeys by lorry there—we managed to organise the production of dried potatoes so that potatoes could be brought from those remote areas. People worked at home for us—we had ten thousand collective farmers working for us in their homes."

"Did they dry the potatoes themselves in their stoves?"

"The potatoes were given out to the collective farmers, and they dried them. And some of them we dried in the drying ovens we managed to build somehow."

"You had ten thousand home-workers?"

"Yes, they worked at home, drying potatoes for the city of Leningrad..."

We have already quoted numerous stories in which people recalled how hunger made everybody keep looking around with anxiety and hope, scrutinising corners and drawers in their flats—to make sure there was nothing edible that had been overlooked. Something not hitherto considered edible... But in this starvation siege the whole city was behaving in exactly the same way as the individual citizen. The Badayevsky Stores were burnt down on September 8 but the people around went on digging the earth on the site for a long time afterwards. But it was the same with organisations, too—with that very Leningrad fruit and vegetable supplies administration...

"How much sugar was burnt there?"

"A lot, but I boiled it again for jam," Stanislav Przhevalsky protested. "True, it had grains of sand in it. There was some sugar left that was so burnt you couldn't do anything with it. But any that could possibly be used, we used."

He went on to tell a story that many today remember with surprise, even with amusement, the story of how the blockaded city discovered that it had enormous "deposits" of sauerkraut beneath it.

"I was summoned by Kapustin, secretary of the city Party committee. 'What are you doing, sitting there? Do you know what's going on at the works?' 'Well, what is?' I asked. 'There are over ten thousand people digging up the whole of your works.' Someone had told him of this. I drove there rightaway."

"When was that? In the autumn?"

"In 1942. Well, I arrived. It was true, the manager had picked up about 15,000 spades. Everyone was digging, then throwing down their spades and taking the sauerkraut. Somebody knew that there had been a surplus of sauerkraut delivered to Leningrad in 1935 (before my time) and it hadn't been eaten."

"What year?"

"Thirty-five."

"It'd lain there all that time?"

"Right there in the barrels. They'd been covered with sand, which, I'd say, was an excellent thing for preserving them. Someone knew about it, and excavations started. There were 5,000 tons of that sauerkraut, and it was all gone within 24 hours."

"What was it like? Did you try it?"

"Delicious."

"Are you serious? After being there since 1935?"

"It still had just the right consistency and flavour. Everything as it should be."

"They took the barrels and threw down the spades? You say that

15,000 spades had been collected?"

"Yes, 15,000 were collected, which people threw down when they'd finished digging."

"So 15,000 people turned up?"

"That's right. You couldn't stop them, so we let them carry on. So the area was cleared of sauerkraut."

Things just worked out the way they did. Of course, there were miscalculations in the transport and storage of provisions, and in the evacuation of people at that early stage when there was confusion and lack of appreciation of the scale of what was happening, and of how and in what direction events were developing. Even such a positive factor as the patriotism and passionate dedication of Leningraders to their city, which played such a tremendous role in the steadfast defence of Leningrad, had pernicious consequences. People who could and should have left the city, not only in their own interests but in those of the active defenders of the city, did not go.

It is enough to recall that 400,000 children were among those caught within the deadly ring of the blockade. Mothers, grandmothers—and with them children—remained behind. In summer and autumn 1941 there was not enough insistence, firmness and tenacity in the way evacuation was carried out. That came later, when conditions were incomparably more difficult, in winter-time, when the necessity arose to transport from the city (even to take out on foot for hundreds of kilometres!) about a million women, children and others weak with hunger, during severe frosts and under bombing and shelling.

Many people speak and write of all this in a self-critical spirit, assessing the complex circumstances of the time.

"It has to be said—and it's no news to anyone," *Ivan Andreyenko* recalls, "that before the war we had not worked out an emergency system of regulating food and consumer goods supplies in case of war. What we had worked out was how to fight incendiaries, put out fires and so on, but not that... I should like to mention another serious matter. It's the fact that 2,544,000 people remained in the besieged city, and another 38,000 in areas around Leningrad that came within the ring of the blockade. Furthermore, a lot of them were old people, there were over 400,000 children and over 700,000 non-working dependants. Yet in the first evacuation, which started on June 29 (the Leningrad city Soviet took the decision) we actually evacuated only 636,000. There was even talk that despite the tight situation Leningraders would stay where they were, no one would run away, no one would leave their city. Reports were coming into the city Soviet from the various districts that the mood of the people was not to go anywhere, but to stay and defend their Leningrad. From one point of view, you see, it was good, but from another it was bad, because we shouldn't have evacuated 636,000 but many more than that, twice as many, even three times. Then we would not have had to go through as much as we did—there were 2,544,000 left in the city.

"Later, when there was a special decision of the State Defence Committee to evacuate people across Lake Ladoga, and Alexei Kosygin came to Leningrad, they began to bring food over in one direction and take people

out in the other. I must say that between January and October 1942 over 900,000 were evacuated that way. I had the exact figures somewhere—ah, here they are: from January to October 1942 inclusive a total of 961,079 people were evacuated. By 1943 there were about 700,000 people left. Yes, by November-December of that year there weren't many people left in Leningrad."

Ivan Andreyenko's name is remembered by those who went through the blockade. The announcements of how much food was to be issued on ration cards—awaited with such trepidation—were countersigned "I. A. Andreyenko".

"Andrei Zhdanov said: 'We must make use of the newspaper *Leningrad Pravda* and the radio. Who has personal responsibility for supplies? Ivan Andreyenko...' (I was deputy chairman of the Leningrad city Soviet, and was in charge of the trade department.) 'Let him make the announcements to the people,' Zhdanov said."

It was a bitter necessity to announce ever more new reductions in the rations, already at starvation and even fatal levels. In those days and weeks (October-December 1941) Ivan Andreyenko was far from seeming a benevolent genie to the blockade victims. He realised that. But he had his reward when things began to improve a little with the organisation of the Road of Life. Then he was able to put his signature to announcements of a different kind...

"I remember one evening in December when I was with Alexei Kuznetsov, city Party committee secretary. Once again we were reviewing the food stocks we had in hand. There was no way we could cut down the bread ration any more, for the people were already dying. We kept going over the situation again and again, weighing things up. I'd known Kuznetsov before the war, had met him on a number of occasions. He was a strong character and had done a great deal to save the lives of any Leningraders, but I had never seen him looking so gloomy. Nevertheless, he went on to say (and I have this noted down): 'You know, we can't just give up, we can't!' He quoted this example: 'You know what a man at the Kirov Works told me? We'll gnaw at stones, he said, but we won't surrender Leningrad!' We went to Comrade Zhdanov and reported. That time we did not reduce the rations of the civilian population, but took it from the military—from the soldiers and sailors. Things were bad in December. What else could we do? There was nothing left to reduce."

"What about the food they brought in across Ladoga?"

"At first that was, well, just a drop in the ocean. At that time we had some emergency reserves—rusks in army units and flour dispersed among the various warships in Kronstadt. They were for an emergency. The Military Council of the Leningrad Front took a decision to use these rusks and the flour to feed soldiers, sailors and civilians, because there just couldn't be any more reductions."

At last! At long last the scales began to tip...

"When the inflow of flour on the 21st, 22nd and 23rd of December began to exceed consumption, we met in Zhdanov's office. After that the question was reviewed at a meeting of the Military Council. There the decision was taken to add 100 grammes to the workers' bread ration from

December 25th, 1941, which meant 350 grammes instead of 250, and an extra 75 grammes to the rations of other categories.

"I have to admit that the addition, of course, was not very much, but the question was, how would the people receive it? (Then, too, we were interested in the way people reacted.) People didn't know (the decision was taken the previous evening) that when they got to the bakers' in the morning they'd get 200 grammes instead of 125. They drew strength not only from the fact that they could eat another 75 grammes of bread but from the belief that things were, despite everything, moving towards the point when we would overcome fascists and that we would cope with the supplies problems..."

Every leader, whether he likes it or not, has a reputation among the people. No one can escape this judgement, especially a person who has announced to you the verdict—whether you are to live or die, whether your miserable bread ration is to increase or, on the other hand, to be reduced... Demands on such a person are especially high. Above all, in those conditions a man's everyday life was not to be divorced from his work. Everything was examined inside and out. Most people lived on the job. It's not hard to imagine how self-exacting every honest official tried to be. Self-exacting, and exacting in relation to others... Here Stanislav Przhvalsky speaks of the scrupulousness of those times, giving the following example:

"The Front Commander was taken ill. His adjutant came to see me, knowing that there were still five live milch cows on the Myaglovo state farm, and what's more he brought a medical certificate saying that milk was needed. I reported to Andreyenko that I had given five litres to the adjutant. What did I get for that? He said: 'You know, in wartime they shoot people for that kind of thing. What right had you to do it without permission from those who are in charge of food supplies? We've got a committee of three, you know.' I replied: 'I didn't give it to just anybody, but to the commander to whom the three of them are responsible.' 'It doesn't matter who it was. If there's a procedure laid down, you've got to stick to it,' he said. 'But you weren't here,' I pointed out. 'You wouldn't have refused, anyway.' 'No, I wouldn't, but next time don't do such things!' You understand the man's attitude to the procedures which had been laid down?"

Still energetic, in full command of himself, not knocked off balance by life's ordeals, and with a ready, lively smile that belied his years, Ivan Andreyenko cherishes the memory of something he looked upon as a great reward:

"Once when I was at a factory—I don't remember which one it was now—I was walking along with the manager and the secretary of the Party Committee (I had been addressing a meeting there). As we walked, someone boomed in a deep bass: 'Look what he's like, that Andreyenko! He can't even feed himself, so how can he manage the communal pot?' I really was skinny. If I'd been fat, of course, they'd have said: 'It's all too clear!' But the women stuck up for me: 'Don't be such a fool!' they

*Ivan Andreyenko,
Deputy-chairman of the Leningrad City
Executive Committee,
Head of the Trade Department,
1941*



demanded. 'It means he hasn't been eating your rations—if he had, he wouldn't look like that! '"

When you study the conditions of life and of work in blockaded Leningrad, when you think of the people who had to take the difficult, complicated decisions you inevitably come back to one thing—the mutual appreciation of those who led and those who were led. You lead people in accordance with your understanding of them, your evaluation of them. Ivan Andreyenko's view of blockaded Leningraders was by no means oversimplified, not an abstract romantic view—different people came to him at the most critical moments in their lives, attempting to save themselves and their dear ones...

Andreyenko's stories say a lot of good things about people in those years. He appreciated the cost of displaying—and on a mass scale—conscientiousness, discipline and kindness. And that in conditions of mass starvation, when, you might think, inevitably the most egotistic and crude instincts would be unleashed.

"There was this instance, somewhere in November or December 1941, the most difficult time of all. One day a big well-built man walked into a baker's in Volodarsky district (it's Nevsky district now). He did not resemble the customers or the saleswomen (the latter differed little from the customers). So he looked about him, went straight to the counter and said: 'Listen to what I've got to say. They want to starve us to death!' Then he started flinging the loaves out. 'Take them,' he said, 'and eat them!' You understand? But the people didn't take them. There were about a dozen customers there, and three saleswomen. They grasped the situation and although they weren't particularly strong, they outnumbered

him, and they brought him to the ground. Even some schoolchildren lent a hand—they ran to the militia station (there was no telephone), and the militia came and took him away. He turned out to be a provocateur.”

“So there was discipline on the whole?”

“At that time in Leningrad discipline was good. Well, at the beginning, people had to adjust to things. I’ve already mentioned that as we accustomed ourselves to it so did the rest of the people. There were a few isolated cases of stealing. What could one do with valuables? You know, of course, that you could have bought a gold watch for a kilogram of bread.”

“But who traded like that in the market?”

“All kinds of people. I can give you an example. A boy went to the second-hand clothes market. There were only two boys left in the family—this older one and a younger brother. They had ration cards. Their father was at the front, and their mother had died of starvation. So they wanted to sell a jacket in the market. They went there, and a man bought the jacket for 300 grammes of bread. Well, they went home and ate the bread. Then the next day they woke up—they’d eaten the jacket, you might say, but where were their ration cards? They’d left them in the jacket pocket. The boy who’d done the selling remembered the buyer because of his beard. And that man with the beard came to their home—their address had been on the cards, so he came to return them. What do you think of that?”

“Astonishing! But how did you hear about the case?”

“People used to let us know of things like that... They’d collect stories about all kinds of things in Leningrad, good and bad. There were few bad ones, more good ones, of course.”

“And how would you get hold of such stories?”

“They’d be passed on to the Leningrad Soviet. I’ve got another example concerning the sale of food. This is what Leningraders were like! A lorry laden with bread was going along a road when it was hit by a shell, and the driver was killed. It was dark. People crowded round—they could have grabbed the bread and run. But this didn’t happen. There wasn’t a crumb lost. The militia were called and everything was loaded onto another vehicle and driven off... Or there was the case of the two schoolgirls. A shop caught fire... No, I’m wrong, there were four schoolgirls. So the four of them rushed into the shop and started helping the shop assistants pull out sugar and cereals. At the same time one of them ran off to summon the fire brigade. So the girls saved a lot of food intended for distribution. That’s what happened... But I haven’t told you yet that, however odd it may seem and although things were very tight, the Leningrad Soviet and its executive committee, with the support of the Military Council of the Leningrad Front and the city and regional Party committees, decided to organise New Year parties for schoolchildren from the 1st to the 10th of January 1942. I’ve a document. Here it is: ‘The Holding of New Year Parties in Premises Provided with Bomb Shelters.’ *Lenglavrestoran** laid on New Year dinners off the ration and presents at the New Year party for those who took part. From Georgia tangerines had been sent for Le-

* *Lenglavrestoran*—organisation responsible for Leningrad restaurants.—*Tr.*

ningrad, and it was decided that these had to be got to the city by the New Year. The delivery was assigned to the drivers of the 390th motorised battalion, and they got through. When the New Year parties were held the children were given these gifts."

Many people remember those tangerines, which were unbelievable in such conditions. The memory is like a warm wave linking those who grew them and delivered them to Leningrad and those who received them, took them with small children's hands, hid them away, clutched them beneath their clothing and took them home—for mummy...

We shall quote those stories in the chapter "Leningrad Children".

A particularly important aspect of the Leningrad blockade was the organisation of the Road of Life. From what has been written subsequently we know who helped bring this life-saving idea to fruition, what energy, labour and self-denial it demanded from both organisers and workers responsible for the creation of this ice route out of the besieged city. But it is a very special theme. Suffice it to say that the organisation of an escape route across frozen Lake Ladoga—a task of unprecedented audacity and complexity—could only have been undertaken in the belief that our people were capable of the impossible.

It is not surprising that many of those who lived through the blockade even now experience a sense of comradeship and duty with regard to one another. In order to understand why Major-General *Emelyan Logutkin*, who had been through his baptism of fire in Spain, is worried about how the veterans of AA Defence Organisation are getting along and constantly endeavours to secure for them equality with "the regular troops who participated in the Great Patriotic War", one has to listen to what he has to tell about these 17-19-year-old girls who took the place of the men gone to the front, who withstood all the ordeals and proved able to cope with anything...

"I have been speaking of the grim period of the blockade, I have in mind the first winter. I'd say it was the most terrible experience of coming to grips with the enemy at the walls of Leningrad. Apart from the task of directly defending the city, we also had to help the front."

"You say that 8,000 went to the front?"

"Yes, 8,000."

"When was that?"

"At the most difficult time of all, after which we had a total of only two and a half thousand fighting personnel left. I raised the question what was to happen next. I reported to the commanders, in particular to General Dmitri Gusev, Chief-of-Staff of the Front: 'What are we going to do next?' I asked. 'There's no one to defend the city with.' 'Don't worry, we're going to help you,' he told me. Some time later I was summoned to Govorov, the Front Commander. He listened to me, and he, too, said, 'We'll give you some help.' After some time I was summoned by General Gusev. He said, 'Rejoice, you'll get some reinforcements!' 'What kind of reinforcements? Who are they? Where are they from?' 'We're sending you some Leningrad women.' A little later I asked: 'And why are you looking at me like that?' 'We're sending you some women!' 'Wait,' I said. 'Are they from the army?' He said to me quietly: 'Cannot you under-

stand, Comrade Logutkin, my dear friend? We have no men soldiers left in Leningrad. Now you have to draw the conclusion for yourself—you must do everything you can to turn these women into soldiers! ' In a little while we got about 17,000 young women and girls from Leningrad. They were a splendid lot... I have a good knowledge of history in general, and of our military history. I don't think there's ever been a case in our history when regular units of our troops were made of women. Personally I have never heard of such a thing. To begin with, therefore, we were at sea ... until we understood that this contingent, too, had to learn to fight, especially as the enemy was preparing for an offensive on the city. And we started to teach them."

"That was early in 1942?"

"Yes, if I remember right, in March 1942. That was when we began to train the personnel."

It's an easy thing to say—teach them. To teach this age-old masculine art to women, often hardly more than girls—and, moreover, starving, exhausted and emaciated to the limit.

What that looked like at the beginning and how it was later on was related to us (not without humour, also of an age-old masculine type) by *Ivan Kalyagin*—formerly in the submarine service and afterwards assistant director of the Kirov Works' anti-aircraft defence unit.

"Well, at first they brought these women to the barracks (and our barracks were also in a state of neglect—the men, after all, hadn't done anything particular to beautify their mansion—they didn't always clean it). So these women arrived at our mansions. We occupied schools and nursery schools.

"Well, as you'd expect, the company commanders were still men. They'd give the command: 'Attention!' And just imagine it, the rank of women rose to their feet. Wrapped in scarves, hair sticking out, their faces blue! I looked at them and was scared. I took company commander Lapin aside and asked: 'Why are all these women you've got pregnant? They've only just arrived!'

"He replied: 'They're not, what are you thinking of! They've been eating their fill of herbs. They pick these herbs, you know, boil up this wishy-washy soup and eat it. People want to eat, after all!'

Women remained women—they did their best to be liked by their commanders. Otherwise, god forbid, they might not be accepted...

Alexandra Arsenyeva joined the "Komsomol regiment" in the following way. Her girl friend spotted her and called: " 'You know', she said, 'you have to work an awful lot but they feed you hot food three times a day.'"

"I said: 'Lyusenka! Will they take me on? I'm only a bag of bones. I'll fall over with the slightest breeze!'

"She remarked: 'You know what! You put some make-up on! You used to dress nicely, so you turn up looking smart. They'll take you. Just put some make-up on!'

"But I hadn't any lipstick, I hadn't anything. I borrowed some rouge from my neighbour, and put some on my cheeks and my lips. I put my fur hat on and went off! Well, that Lyusenka Budakova, who's in the Altai these days, had already told the commander that I was a well-educated

girl of outstanding political awareness, and an artist—she really talked her head off—that I wrote poetry and goodness knows what else. (I did write poetry then.) He was already to some extent prepared for me. When he saw me, I made a good impression and he sent me to Pesochneya. You know Pesochneya? I had to walk from Baskov Lane, from the end of Baskov Lane to Pesochneya to go through the formalities at the regimental HQ! It was terrible! ”

“He was taken in by your rosy cheeks?”

“It was lasting colour, that rouge! But when I reached Pesochneya, I thought I wouldn’t manage to get all the way back. I lay down somewhere or other, sat somewhere and wondered however I was going to get back. But I had to, I just had to! My child was home alone in Mokhovaya Street. And it was the child that spurred me on all the time—the child! If it hadn’t been for the child, I’d have lost heart. But I had my little girl—she was a pretty little thing. I had to get to my feet for the sake of my daughter. So I kept walking and walking. I walked along the Field of Mars and suddenly saw a man bent over, stooping, picking something out of the snow and putting it into his mouth, something red, a kind of a raspberry colour. People kept walking along, scooping whatever it was up, and putting it in their mouths. I bent down—it turned out that someone had spilt some fruit syrup. Then they were issuing syrup. And here people were scooping up the drops from the snow! And I did it, too, and got a little syrup! So I walked and walked. I ran. Then I stopped. ‘No, I mustn’t stop, I’ll fall down. Must keep going, my daughter’s there.’ Once again, my daughter! Well, I made it. The commander asked: ‘Aren’t you tired? Have you brought your documents?’

“Lusya winked at me, and I gave an idiotic smile: ‘No!’ I thought to myself: if only my legs’ll hold out, if only I can manage not to fall! ”

“Well, eventually I got them into order,” Ivan Kalyagin said. “At first I was frightened, and submitted an application (because I was a navy specialist and I’d been invited to go into the navy) to be released! Well, I got told off! ”

“A dressing down?”

“Yes. Called me a coward. What are you after? Do you want a first category ration? Afraid of dying of hunger here? they taunted. Well, that hurt, and I stayed, of course. We had to make those women into soldiers. We had to start by training some sergeants. So we established a three-month sergeant’s training course. We needed suitable officers as teachers. One officer turned up, discharged from hospital, a cavalryman. In the early battles for Leningrad he had been hacked about all over and, frankly speaking, he was a ghastly sight. His face was striped with scars. But he was a regular officer. He could not conceive of being discharged from the army (they wanted to discharge him because his skull had been damaged). I asked the military command to let me have him, and they sent him to me—they mobilised him and assigned him to me. He became head of the school. Well, of course, the girls cried when they began to be taken seriously in hand. But in three months they had to get through a six-year programme. Well, there was no point in their getting a baptism of fire.



Everyone had already been shelled. Nevertheless, I sometimes received reports that the school had moved from its position and set off towards the line of the front."

"What does that mean?"

"It means that he would form up the cadets at night, when there was a practice alarm, and take them to a forward position. True, at first we panicked. We thought maybe he'd gone off his head, had some kind of brainstorm. We were wrong! He was doing it for a purpose. He worked with them day and night."

"What kind of test did those trainees go through?"

"What kind? He led them to Forel Hospital—there they were under mortar fire. They all crawled along trenches, crawled in, through, and out of the firing zone. He lined them up—and took them back. It was simple during the war, quite simple. We were morally responsible for people's lives, but these girls had to be trained. At the end of the course there was a kind of exam—and not one of them failed. They all received the rank of sergeant, some became senior sergeants, and a few of them sergeant-majors. All of them women. And when the trained personnel joined companies, it was something of a revolution, of course. In no time members of companies were transformed into real soldiers. Later on I commanded a regiment working on the restoration of the railway line to Pskov and, working on the Karelian Isthmus, in the minefields, I came in contact with various military units. And when unit commanders saw for themselves what the women soldiers were like, I heard them say, again and again: 'I'd swap any company of men for your girls.'"

"Now," General Lagutkin echoed Kalyagin, "now as I look back I can

say outright that we men, soldiers and officers, owe never-ending gratitude to those women. They had been sweeping incendiaries off the roofs of houses, putting out fires, digging out those buried under debris, helping the starving and the dying, burying the dead and saving the city from epidemics... After the blockade had been broken, or rather lifted, those self-same girls, on the instructions of the Leningrad Front command, helped units at the front to smash the enemy. In the difficult winter conditions, often on mined territory, our regiments restored the main railway lines as they moved after the advancing troops. They rebuilt 202 km of railway line, 15 railway bridges and 17 wooden foot-bridges. They cleared a large area of mines to enable the troops to pass. Once when I was on one sector of the front our troop trains were travelling along lines restored by our women soldiers, and the men and officers shouted 'Hurrah' from the coaches, cheering those splendid women and expressing thanks to them with tears in their eyes. And another thing. We can't leave out of account such undertakings as clearing the suburbs of Leningrad of mines. Take the Pulkovo Heights, Pushkin, Kolpino, Petrodvorets, and many, many other places. After all, there were millions of mines and shells there. In most cases it was soldiers of the anti-aircraft defence who removed them."

"In fact the girls?"

"That's right. They rendered over seven million explosive devices harmless. What's that if not heroism? Can it be forgotten? ('Many of ours were killed—18 per cent,' Kalyagin put in.) And they rebuilt practically all the main buildings in the city. From among their ranks were trained thousands of plasterers, electricians, drivers, carpenters and workers of other essential trades. It was the women who restored the embankment of the Fontanka River, who laid the tram line along Staro-Nevisky Prospekt, rebuilt hundreds of schools, hospitals and so on. Right now I have a mental picture of how we sent people off after demobilisation. But they didn't go home! If you were demobbed, it meant that you could just go home. But—not on your life! That mustn't be forgotten. They didn't go home—they were detailed to go to the factories and to many other places."

We should add that with the help of the anti-aircraft defence forces it was possible to carry out a great undertaking that was of extreme importance to the country—unique machines, armour steel and non-ferrous metals essential for industry in the Urals were got out of Leningrad in the winter of 1941-42.

The people we met and questioned, and whose stories we recorded gave us the names of dozens of their colleagues, gave them their due, speaking of the work and the heroism of both well-known and forgotten leaders on the blockade front who injected into the city's life determination and cool-headedness, who ensured good management and inspired ingenious efforts to find ways out of situations that were at times hopeless. But it was impossible to name and list all those who at first mentally, and then on the map and across the not yet firm ice of Ladoga laid the road to salvation, those who kept their heads and, when the bakeries had to stop working and the city was sinking into





a fatal coma, ordered electricity to be supplied by warships, or those who obtained and supplied Leningraders with seeds and potato eyes in spring and summer 1942—a time when the city dwellers became farmers.

We were immensely impressed by the inexhaustible reserves of people's spiritual strength. And something else—what could be achieved by a high level of organisation, what possibilities were opened up by the type of work we describe with the official adjective "organisational". How much more can be done, it turns out, even when no more seems possible! How much more can be found to say, what strong emotions can be evoked and how much can be demanded (calmly!) of others and of oneself when it seems that no one is capable of doing any more...

The statisticians have calculated that in a period of not quite six war months of 1941 Leningrad's workers supplied the Red Army and Navy with 713 tanks, 480 armoured cars, 58 armoured trains, 2,405 large-calibre and 648 anti-tank guns, and about 10,000 rocket-launchers, and produced more than three million shells and mines, and over 80,000 mortar rockets and air bombs. In addition, about 500 tanks and over 300 guns were repaired at the Kirov Works, the Metallist Plant and other enterprises. The Admiralty, Baltic and other shipyards rearmed and repaired 186 ships of various types.

About a million people were evacuated in 1942, the worst year... All that was done in those unthinkable conditions.

FROM ONE DAY TO THE NEXT

For the living life went on: work, worrying thoughts about the latest news on the radio, concern about food, warmth, and one's nearest and dearest—each day still had 24 hours, and each day was an ordeal. In the stories, the present-day recollections of blockade survivors there are many facts and revealing details. They include records of everyday life. The memory (particularly the memory of women) tenaciously and distinctly preserves the unbelievable reality of those days and nights.

But it is the diaries that convey with particular completeness the breath of the time, the feverish daily reality, when life and death approached as close as can be, bending over the faint warmth of the *burzhuika* together with the Leningraders themselves.

Strange as it may seem, many people kept diaries then. Some did it out of long habit, from long acquaintance with pen and paper. Often the diarists displayed not only an ability to record facts and experiences, but also a desire to comprehend in a new way both man and history, and in general the whole world: war and the blockade presented plenty of reasons and material for this. One diary of this kind is the "daily notes" of *Georgi Knyazev*, director of the USSR Academy of Sciences Archives. His *In Be-leaguered Leningrad* was handed over to us by his widow, *Maria Knyaze-*

va.* This document, which consists of over 1,200 typewritten pages, deserves special study and discussion. For the time being we'll refer only to one or two places which bring out the essential idea of Knyazev's diary.

"I go to work.** I try to think about work, about the history of culture... I write of myself not as a subject but an object. Everything I've experienced, is experienced by others, too. Many endure the same things, but it all ends in a 'fluttering' of the heart, is dimly reflected, without bright imagery, without clear thinking. What a multitude of sufferings! And they are all forgotten, fade, evaporate. In retrospect it all seems different, as *we would have wanted it to be*. And many of the most ordinary people seem heroes. They appear tragic only when the spectator is watching.

"But nobody knows what goes on in a person's heart when he is alone with himself, with all his contradictions, all the upsurges and declines of his spirit. And I want to record the image of such a person... The most shameful thing of all for a soldier is faintheartedness, cowardice. The same thing applies to us civilians. But the common man is incapable of remaining as fine-tuned as a violin string for 24 hours a day. Any string has to be tuned from time to time."

So the author of the diary tunes himself, and he does this partly through the self-control of the diary. To prevent hunger from devouring his spirit along with his muscles. While recording what he observed within a "small



* She was of great help to us in understanding the personality and work of her husband.

** Georgi Knyazev lived not far from the USSR Academy of Sciences Archives, on 7th Line, Vasilievsky Island. The Archives were at No. 2. He went to work in a wheel-chair, for his legs were paralysed.



Georgi Knyazev, 1959.

radius" (his home, the street along which he went to the Archives, his work), he was trying to overflow into the "big radius".

About the civilian defenders of Leningrad, about those dead or dying from hunger or shelling, he wrote with respect, but as they included himself, he formulated it in this way: "the passive heroic defenders of Leningrad", "the heroic passive defenders" (having in mind the fact that they could not see the enemy and could not inflict direct damage on him).

"Intelligentsia! Yes, we remain what we were... We still have shame, a conscience. The old intellectuals were thought ridiculous, but it was they who created the great humanistic Russian culture and the prerequisites for the October Socialist Revolution... I am doing everything I can to preserve consideration and kindness towards people, to make life easier. I have no bread, but so far I have words, good, heartening words. They don't take the place of bread... But how disgusting it is when others without bread resort to stone-throwing...

"12.10.41. Sunday. Day 113.

"I've spent the whole day getting my files in order. I've put my notes into three files—one inside the other. Will they survive, or be lost? Will they burn, be dispersed by blast? In the attempt to prevent this happening I've put them, and also the notes I wrote earlier, on the bottom shelf of the bookcase."

Among all his various conjectures, neither in November, nor in December, nor at any time later did the thought enter his mind that his notes might fall into the hands of nazis entering the city. Not once in his diary, which at any moment could be ended by death, a document that was sincere, as frank as a confession, never did Knyazev seriously imagine Leningrad falling. It was not that he dismissed the thought as weakness, he simply could not conceive of such a thing.

His aim in keeping the diary was not in order to while away the time. The USSR Academy of Sciences Archives went on functioning. Under Knyazev's leadership work continued on *The History of the Academy of Sciences*, the staff kept coming to work, they gathered documents and the most valuable ones were evacuated. It was the diary of a working man. The daily entries, consisting of several pages, were written when the working day was over. They did not simply record alarms, bombing and hunger, in them was the work of the Archives, the life of the institution and its staff, and the public life of the city.

It is interesting to trace through the diary the changing views and evaluations of the author himself, on the war, on hunger and on the purpose of man's life. Such genuine documents contain valuable details about the city's life, what its streets and buildings looked like, about its smells, colours and sounds—everything that enables one to imagine Leningrad at that time. For the most part such details have only been preserved in diaries. There they are treasured in their reality, regardless of capricious memory.

"The sphinxes, my ancient friends, stand lonely on the half-deserted embankment...

"Opposite them the massive building of the Arts Academy looms dark-

ly with its boarded-up windows. It's still oppressive with its somehow weighty white grandeur. The trees have thinned out in the Rumyantsev Garden, which is barer than it was. There's a camp there. Red Armymen are wandering about, campfires are burning, and a horse is cropping the remnants of yellowed grass. By the obelisk stands some sort of van. In the avenues are several lorries. The others, which virtually filled the Garden, have gone off somewhere. The dark, leaden water of the Neva ripples beneath the falling flakes of damp snow. Across from the Senate is a three-funnel warship, which almost conceals that magnificent building from the Neva side. Peter's splendid monument is submerged in the sand poured all round it... The city's founder is hidden in a wooden case with sandbags... It's an autumn scene. Every day, and every time, I'm always filled with emotion at the sight of that wonderful Leningrad panorama. As I go out through the front door the first thing I do is to make sure the sphinxes are still whole, that St. Isaac's is whole, and the Admiralty spire, and the angel with a cross on top of the Alexander Column...

"8.11.41. Saturday. Day 140.

"The row of old houses along the embankment, from the 1st Line to the university, presents a sad sight. All of them have had their windows broken or blown right out. The Menshikov Palace was evidently in the centre of the blast wave, and all its round windows at the top and those in the middle storey, above the balcony, are gaping holes, there's not a single one with glass left in it. On the ground floor there are only one or two windows broken. In the wings of the Menshikov Palace there are also a great many broken or blown-out windows and mutilated window frames. There is the same kind of havoc at the former archives of military training establishments and at the Philological Faculty of the university. I can't fathom what's happened. There's no sign of damage from an air raid, and the embankment is all right. The yardman told me that a bomb had dropped in the Neva, near the bank, and broken all the windows along the embankment. But perhaps these are the results of shells that had fallen in yesterday's artillery fire—we heard the cannonade in the morning. There's a third possibility. Opposite, by the Senate, there's a three-funnel warship with long-range naval guns. People say that two days ago, during an air raid, they let off some salvoes. Sailors have told me in the past that if the long-range guns bark from a ship on the Neva, then all the glass will be blown out of the windows around here on the embankment.

"So far at the Academy of Sciences everything is as before, except that the old window frames in the Zoological and Ethnographic museums are patched up with plywood.

"I took a good look at the embankment on the other side of the Neva. I couldn't see any more damage to the windows, because most of them were long ago boarded up.

"19.11.41. The funnels of the ships along the Neva embankment have been painted white. Lorries which had been painted with green patches have been painted over white, the colour of snow.

"The Neva is beginning to be covered with ice.

"By the building of the First Cadet Corps on Syezdovskaya Line women, young people, old folk, children are crowding around waiting to meet relatives—wounded and convalescent soldiers. Sometimes for some reason the crowd begins rushing from one place to another, gazing into the windows. In some cases their eyes suddenly light up, others stand there looking gloomy, exasperated or quite apathetic. Some of them have bundles in their hands.

"The Leningraders are poorly dressed and have lost all pretensions to style, especially the women. I saw a couple yesterday: he was in military uniform, she was walking arm-in-arm with him dressed in a grey padded jacket, baggy padded trousers and a brown fez with a pompon. But her face looked young, unsophisticated, content. She was evidently with her fiancé or young husband. Others were wearing collections of garments from different 'chronological strata'. It will be difficult, even impossible, for an artist or a writer of the future to recreate that crowd and the way it looked in the street; they will inevitably have to resort to invention and stage properties."

Such diaries are rare. The majority of people recorded their own experiences, their own battles for life, for their dear ones. There are diaries which are tragic narratives of the fate of a family or of an individual, and of how he resisted desperately, how he worked (most diaries were kept by people who worked). Some of the diaries that came into our hands mainly described what people ate and where, how the ration cards were distributed, and what was available on the ration. In one of these A. *Belyakov* wrote with ever-growing attention to detail:

"6th January, 1942. I went to the canteen in Chubarov Lane. I ate four portions of oilcake porridge—there wasn't anything else. For the porridge they took coupons for 50 grammes of cereal... The porridge was hard to digest, I've got pains in my stomach...

"16th January. I queued about two hours for bread. I joined the queue at 5 a.m. ... and only at 8 o'clock did I get some warm bread... Today dinner acquired a fairy-tale character, lasting from 11 to 16.30. In that time I ate one plate of cabbage soup, one of noodle soup, and one of barley soup. I've drunk a lot of water, and my face is badly swollen..."

With what is now inexplicable persistence he lists almost daily these figures, dishes and grammes. This was what life meant to him, or perhaps it seemed to him to be what was also the most important, the most valuable thing for history? And so from day to day extends the story of how he, Belyakov, tried to find someone to make him boxing gloves into mittens, because his hands used to get so badly frostbitten, and he had to carry firewood, and bread, and water.

Many began to keep diaries only with the onset of the blockade—for the first time in their lives. People started to feel that they were in the centre of events of a kind that they themselves would find difficult to credit: had it really happened, could that possibly have taken place, could I conceivably have been through all that? Here is a recording of a talk we

had with *Galina Babinskaya*. We have already spoken of her—a tall, elderly, beautiful woman living in an old St. Petersburg apartment, where the grand piano, the walls and the moulded ceiling were also in a way part of the blockade diary.

“That ceiling, which had caved in, was later repaired, strangely enough, by German prisoners-of-war.”

“What? Those paintings—did they do those?”

“No, just plastering. That patch, lighter than the rest—they did that. We had a neighbour and these Germans were assigned to do up his room. Later he sent them to us to repair the ceiling. That was probably in 1946, or maybe 1945, if not in '44. Here the moulding and the painting needed restoring, but it was expensive and there wasn't time. And here are fragments of glass, still embedded in the grand piano, it still sparkles. The house opposite was ruined by bombing. It used to be a two-storey building (now they've added two more storeys). I was at work at the time, but my mother and grandmothers were here. That was in 1942. Now I'm a senior researcher at the State Museum of the Ethnography of the Peoples of the USSR. As I'm an ethnographer I'm to some degree a traveller. At the same time my husband and I really enjoy boating—there's our kayak over there.”

“The diary was written when you were 19?”

“That's right.”

“What was your idea in keeping it?”

“Hard to say. Probably it was because events were such that somehow they couldn't be left unrecorded. The chief thought was that at some time, when all this was finished (I had no doubts on that score, or else we wouldn't have been writing), when that time came and it was finished, I'd read it myself, and obviously, read it to those who hadn't witnessed it.”

“Did you keep a diary before the war?”

“Just a schoolgirl diary, with lots of nonsense in it... The habit of writing, I must say, has remained with me to the present time.”

“Were you confident that you'd survive?”

“I didn't have the slightest doubt about that! It was a silly kind of hope. I'd even be walking along the street under shelling or bombing, and for some reason it would never enter my head that I or members of my family might be hit. Someone else, somewhere else, maybe, but not me, and not those dear to me.”

“Who did your family consist of? Who were you living with?”

“At that time there was my mother, two grandmothers and myself.”

Galina Babinskaya read her diary to us, stopping for explanations from time to time.

“...15th December, '41. The last tram has gone. The tramlines are buried beneath snow and covered with ice. The wires are damaged. The trams stand there on the lines...’ I should explain that later on I went to work at the Tram and Trolleybus Administration and took part in the restoration of that same tram and trolleybus network referred to in the opening lines of my diary. ‘24th December. Bread ration increased—from 125 to 200 grammes for office workers, and from 250 to 350 grammes for workers. Kuzka was saved from death...’ Kuzka was a tomcat. From day

to day we kept intending to eat that cat, had thoughts of killing it. The cat was clean, very nice, and much loved. This note is not accidental, for somehow this moment was put off. Well, we thought the cat had been saved altogether, but it didn't work out. '28 December. We have no water supply in the flat now. We have to go downstairs for it... A delicate subject. On 30th December we used the toilet for the last time. The courtyard received its first "present" in a little envelope...' You understand? Yes? There's no need to comment. 'We clean our teeth rarely. We don't wash more than once a day. The water in buckets and jars in the kitchen freezes. At the end of January we rearranged the room—now it has a *burzhui-ka* in it. We warm up there, prepare food on it three times a day and use it for illumination. 18th January. We've burnt the last candle. We're putting petrol in the paraffin lamp. We use it only when we're eating...' Here's something of importance—it gives a general idea of the state we were in: during breakfast, in the bed, right by the dining table, in that room Men-shikov died. He was the foster son of one of our grandmothers. Of course, it wasn't that he was adopted that explained our reaction. What's important is that a person lay right there in the room, in the bed, while we were consuming the morning portion of food. He died, but breakfast wasn't interrupted. A kind of inhibition set in, there was no room for the emotions natural in normal people and in a normal state... 'For digging the grave and burying the body they asked for a kilogram of bread and 300 roubles in cash.'

"Three hundred roubles for a burial?"

"Yes, and a kilogram of bread. Where were we to get a kilogram of bread, when there wasn't enough on the ration card and they wanted absolutely crazy prices at the market? That was why people took bodies away themselves, wrapping them in a sheet and leaving them somewhere in a corner. The housing administration now had a new obligation (most likely on the orders from the militia since the housing administration must have been under its authority). 'I pledge not to take the corpses of citizens who have no relatives to the cemetery without coffins,' read the oath one had to give. The thing was that corpses were often found in courtyards, in attics, or on stairways. 'In the words of Doctor K., 80 per cent of the men are dying...' That was in mid-January. 'They're taking firewood out of the sheds and putting it in the flats, because the firewood is being stolen from the sheds and the sheds themselves broken up for firewood... Every day mother distributes the bread ration in separate pieces...' That's what I've already been telling you about. Well, that whole ration was divided into three parts each day, and each of those parts had to be divided between the members of the family. 'In the streets there isn't a single dog or cat. They were all eaten in January. And back at the beginning of November you could see dead cats lying about the streets, wrapped up in newspaper.' "

"They'd been thrown out?"

"People were still abandoning them then, but not later on."

"And your cat was already eaten?"

"Not at that point... 'At the beginning of November permission was given to dismantle the fuse boxes owing to the insufficiency of lighting during the day, as a result of which the blackout was seriously violated...

December and January were months of astronomical numbers of deaths: people are dying outside houses, in the street, at work... Dying literally in the street from hunger, enduring superhuman deprivation—the absence of light, warmth, everyday conveniences and comforts, etc., and, the main thing, lack of food—but no complaints have been heard, no defeatist talk...’ That’s what I’ve got written down. And it really was true: absolutely no one said anything. It is typical that the further things went, the more the majority of Leningraders engaged in wishful thinking. That was how it was with the breaking of the blockade, the increase in the bread ration, the liberation of Mga. Here a whole number of other developments are noted: hairdressing establishments closed, cinemas closed, also closed were the Comedy Theatre and the Lenin Komsomol Theatre. The Musical Comedy Theatre was working on and off to begin with, but soon closed down. The city froze. ‘A notice on a shop door: “New coffin for sale.”’ Then follows the price, the dimensions. ... ‘17th January. An Alsatian ran at great speed along Pionerskaya Street. People walking there watched it with greedy, helpless eyes.’ It was altogether surprising—where had it come from, and running so quickly, at that?”

“Perhaps it was an army dog?”

“Yes, it might have been... ‘Stone buildings are on fire. The fires have been going on for weeks. Nothing has been done to put them out—there’s no water, the water mains are out of order. Karl Liebknecht Prospekt, the section from Blokhin to Pionerskaya and Vvedenskaya streets was flooded. That was practically from Tuchkov Bridge to Pionerskaya and Vvedenskaya streets. Water flowed out onto the roadway and it came halfway up the wheels of cars.’ And here something terrible happened. I saw it myself. We went out into the street, and here, opposite my school (across the road from the school I went to) a woman fell into the water. They dragged her out and put her on a step in front of the school. But they had only just put her there. Like that, leaning against the wall. But as the frost was so bitter, evidently they couldn’t do anything for her. So they left her. I saw her myself, frozen like that.”

“She froze standing up?”

“Yes, because she couldn’t move. She couldn’t walk home, and no one was able to carry her there.

“Here’s a characteristic phrase I heard from one old woman: ‘If he comes near me, the son of a bitch (she had Hitler in mind), I’ll give him a drubbing!’ But she herself could scarcely speak owing to weakness and old age. ‘All the wooden houses, all the stalls, and the Lenin Stadium were dismantled for firewood... 15th January. The first passenger trams on regular routes—3, 7, 9, 10, and 12—left the tram depot. The street clock on Bolshoi Prospekt started to show time... The autumn posters saying ‘Everything for the front!’ were replaced by others saying: ‘Everyone to the vegetable plots!’ Notices about the sale of coffins have been replaced by notices about the sale of furniture, domestic utensils, and clothes... Rations are being given in full, but food is by no means cheap (that bought in the market, of course), it’s almost impossible to get, even harder than in winter... Ruined houses are being disguised with decorative walls. A house that had been ruined for a long time, on the corner of Nevsky

Prospekt and Herzen Street (where the Institute's building was) has been covered with all sorts of plywood, posters, and so on. Bomb sites have been converted to vegetable plots...' Well, after that come a few pages of lyrical prose..."

Here is something from the diary kept by *Yelena Averianova-Fyodorova*:
"How did you begin your diary, and why?"

"I didn't begin it... I didn't even know what prompted me into it... I saw off a man who went as a volunteer to the front, and I thought to myself, I'll have to write what things will be like... Well, I don't really know..."

"Would you mind reading us what you consider to be the most interesting things..."

"Well, it doesn't seem all that interesting to me now... Well, at first, it was about that Fedya. Afterwards: 'There's now a bread ration of 600 grammes a day.' They were already beginning to reduce it. Then: 'August 14, 1941. Grandmother, Aunt Tanya, Koka (my godmother) and my sister have come to live with us. They have nothing but their ration cards. Tanya has a little cereal—about two kilograms, a kilogram of potatoes and a little sugar, while grandmother has nothing. But my mother and I had some cereal (millet)—about 4 kilograms, and also 3 kilograms of lentils, 4 of rice, 2 1/2 of semolina, about a kilogram of oats, plus about 6 kilograms of sugar (no, about 5 of granulated sugar), and tea, coffee, salt and mustard... It was all used in common. We cooked everything for everybody, didn't leave anyone out. We spent 150 roubles on cabbage, salted it, and kept on making cabbage soup, followed by porridge, and every day we ate our fill. Everything was all right, and we also had our rations as well. In September we were still living very well, as we had enough for the five of us. The only thing was that every evening at 7 o'clock the bombing began. But we didn't go to the shelter.' "

In those words—"We kept on making cabbage soup" and "every day we ate our fill"—there is such regret and bitterness over their heedlessness! After two or three months such profligacy was to torture them with hunger hallucinations. Who was to know how it would turn out! Even those of the old inhabitants of the city, who had experienced the hunger of the twenties, had no premonition, displayed no foresight.

Yelena Averianova-Fyodorova was leafing through her diary.

"There's again about Fedya... Oh, listen to this: 'We light the stove every other day. We cook everything on that. There's no paraffin ration, we have to burn wood. For the time being we have a lot of that. I think there'll be enough for the winter. So far we're not getting anything extra, although there are five of us in our commune. All the same our household keeps going, so far we have everything. We're not worried about the future. Well, we hope there'll be enough for everyone, we'll have to wait and see. We're still alive. After all, that's a great deal. We're being bombed, and that's frightening. A lot of buildings have been destroyed, and, of course, there have been victims.' "

As for Fedya... Willy-nilly, there's no getting away from it, the story of that first young love runs through that blockade existence, keeps breaking into it. In Leningrad during the blockade front and city were inter-

twined more than anywhere else, were intimately linked throughout those nine hundred days. People walked to the front and they walked back, too. The city could be seen from the trenches, could be seen in flames, burning down. Every night the sky was lit up for a long way around by scarlet tongues of fire. In the daytime the city's silhouette, so familiar, dear to us, and studied to the minutest detail, smoked and smouldered, emanating a sooty haze. It was being consumed by shelling, bombing and fires. But the chimneys sent up no smoke. Not the factory chimneys nor countless stovepipes above the snow-blanketed undulations of the roofs. The air was transparent, optically clear, so one could see a long way. Never before had the city stood out so distinctly against the pale northern sky. It was visible from the forward area near Pushkin, and from the Pulkovo Heights, and from Krasny Bor.

" '9th October. Today I went to see Fedya at Shushary Station. I'll describe it all in order. The evening before I gathered together all I was going to take. I took some warm socks for him, his helmet, and he'd asked me to bring a pipe and tobacco. Instead of bread I bought him some honey cakes and 600 grammes of gooseberry sweets, some sugar, and even a little bottle of wine, cigarettes, envelopes, paper—everything. In the morning I got ready and left the house at 6 a.m. I called for Natasha.' She was someone I knew, who was coming with me... 'We had to pass a great many sentries—and we either had to persuade them, or deceive them, or give them a cigarette so they'd let us through. Some we evaded by crossing minefields, instead of going along the highway, and we walked for a long time over the fields. Later on, when we were already nearing Shushary, we came out onto the main road. But here again the patrol wouldn't let us through, but said: "Where are you going—that's the front over there." And it was true, there was heavy firing going on there. But I decided not to retreat, but to go on all the same. Natasha said: "Well, then let's go home." I told her: "No, we're almost there now, it's only a little further, and I'm not turning back. You can, but I'm going on by myself."

" 'The two of us went on. We met an army man, and he helped us to talk the sentries into letting us through. Along the road we met a woman army doctor, from the very same regiment where our boys were. She knew both of them. So thanks to her we soon found the dug-out where they were. But they'd recently been separated, and Kuzya had been moved further on, while Fedya had remained here. Natasha went on further, I stayed to wait for Fedya, as he wasn't there at the time—he was an orderly. The officer sent someone to fetch him, and invited me into the dug-out to warm up, for it was cold outside and I was in my autumn coat, freezing cold. So I went inside. Before long Fedya arrived. At first we didn't know what to say, couldn't find words. The officer let him off. He said: "Off you go, have a walk. After you've seen her off, come and tell me."

" 'We went into a house. The woman who lived there was in and she invited us to sit down and make ourselves at home. We talked. Then firing began again. We went back into the dug-out, which wasn't very comfortable. After that I went home. I gave him all I'd taken with me. Of course he was glad both because of me and the parcel. He saw me off to the first

post, but further than that he wasn't allowed to go. I walked back home again along the highway. I left Shushary at 2 p.m. and had to be at work at six in the evening. And it was a long way to go, and on top of that I was tired and so it was difficult. But never mind, I'd seen Fedya! Just as I got to the meat-packing plant the shelling began again, and the shells came so close it was terrifying, it really was! I couldn't stop, time was flying by, and I was afraid of being late for work. I ran, bent double, right to the tram stop. I was dog-tired! I got home after five, and just managed to have something to eat and to change my clothes—I had to go to work. I arrived there tired, dying to sleep. At 8 p.m. there was an air raid warning. We went into the bomb shelter, and there I fell asleep. I had a little rest. But I couldn't even work, I was so tired.

" '10th October. Today my whole body aches from yesterday's outing, as if I'd been carrying some great weight about. It's so painful! But I saw Fedya! I don't know whether he was pleased or not, but I was pleased to see him. Despite all the difficulties and the shelling I managed to get there. And I'm glad I saw him. He looks well, and he told me how it had been in battle, how for five days he didn't have anything to eat, how their unit was smashed and how they'd wanted to flee to Leningrad but had met some of their comrades on the road and had remained at Shushary.

" 'Yes, at 18 he'd experienced so much—not good things, not easy ones, but painful things. He had understood early on that life was painful, and now he'd had to go to war and to fight battles. He was young, but he'd had to endure a great deal. For that he was even more dear to me—the fact that he hadn't yet seen anything good and was again having to go through difficult ordeals. War! "Well," he said, "I haven't a mother or a father, but others have, and no one's been to see them, but you've come to see me." I told him I'd try to take the place of his father and mother, his friend and sister, all of them, and that everything within my power I would always do for him. And I'm keeping my promise...' I still thought then that we'd meet again, I hoped for a long time. He was killed...

" '11th October. Fedya asked me to get him some gloves and mittens. I decided to get them through the factory. The trade union committee there has helped me, and got for me not only leather mittens, for shooting, good ones, but also warm underwear, and I am going to visit him once more, on Sunday, and I'll take them with me. I am grateful that they've taken the trouble and helped me to get the things for Fedya.

" "Today we collected money for gifts for the troops. Everyone gave five or ten roubles. But I wasn't bothered about what the others donated and I gave thirty. After all, they're our soldiers, they're defending us.

" '14th October. Today they reduced the bread ration to 500 grammes.

" '15th October. The bread ration's cut to 400 grammes.

" '16th October. Today I went to see Fedya again at Shushary. This time it was more difficult. I went on my own—Natasha didn't want to go any more. I decided to get there, however hard it was.' "

She did get there. How many books have been written about the heroism of a woman's love, how many examples there are, but even so one is astounded anew to hear this unadorned, unsophisticated description of her journey from the city to the front, to the trenches. Before hunger hit

hard. Then she didn't have any strength left.

"Out of those boys who went off as volunteers hardly any returned. Some of the girls did. They had been sent off farther beyond Leningrad. A few of them came back, just two or three. I still meet my girlfriends from those days now and again."

"Was Fedya from your factory?"

"From our factory, where we both worked... '17th January 1942. A terrible time! The war with Germany's been going on for seven months now. It's very difficult to write about what we've been through in this time. But these difficulties are not yet over, we're just going through the most difficult period of this time. I'll give a few facts. 15th January. That day we buried our grandmother—and what I saw that day! I never dreamt that such things could happen. We had to bury her without a coffin, because it's impossible to get a coffin anywhere, and you don't have the strength to make one yourself and if you ask anyone else to do it, they'll only do it in return for bread. But where can you get bread, when we only have a ration of 350 grammes a day, and apart from bread, there's...' " (She began crying). "Oh what am I doing! I didn't dream I'd burst into tears... Well, never mind... Well, 'where can you get bread, when we only have a ration of 350 grammes a day, and apart from bread there's nothing... For 18 days now we've been living on nothing but bread. Hunger's been raging for three months. We've eaten everything we'd had, all our communal food, then everything had been all right. But now when we have nothing left...' "

"Were you still all living together?"

"Yes. But now the break-up started. When nothing was left, they began to leave. Just the two of us, my mother and I, remained. True, she later went away to build defence works, while I went to live at the factory. But at the very darkest time I was working at the factory and we were both still living at home."

"You were twenty then—what about your mother?"

"My mother was fifty. She was born in 1890... 'There hasn't been anything but bread on the ration. Last month we got some other things, but then, in December, the bread ration was only 250 grammes...' This was the smallest worker's ration of the blockade, but later it went up to 350 grammes. We both had workers' cards, we were working... 'Food rations are probably just the same as they were in the hungry year of 1918...' I can't understand what I've written here... 'The bread's very bad, with all sorts of things added... But now we're not even getting that... We took my grandmother to the cemetery on a sledge, pulling it in turn—myself, Mother, Tanya and Shura. We could barely drag our own feet along. With such food, I don't know how we're still alive... And now we were behind someone else—in an endless chain of dead people, mostly without coffins. But that's not the only thing. It's all right if people are taking their own relatives, but what's much worse is that whole lorries are going past laden with bodies, undressed, unshod bodies, all lying anyhow and in different bits of clothes...' They were collecting people in the streets. A person would be walking along, he'd drop, die and be put onto the lorry. And there in the cemetery, there were such enormous common graves..."

'While we were there six lorries and three horse-drawn carts full of bodies arrived. It was horrible to see! And how many more there were that had been brought there earlier but hadn't yet been buried! The workers who had been sent from factories (because not all factories are operating) can't keep up with the digging and burying. Now everyone's buried in common graves, without coffins, one on top of another... A month ago, that is, on December 19, when we buried Kolya...' That was my sister Shura's little boy, my nephew... 'Then the graves were already outside the cemetery, in new areas, and now the common graves are even further out.' "

"Which cemetery was that?"

"Okhta. Bolshaya Okhta. It's still there today. It has tremendous common graves. It's there that we took our grandmother. But we buried Kolya on our own plot, where our father is buried, in the Georgievsky Cemetery—that was what it was called. '22nd January 1942. There's no light, no water, no traffic. The trams aren't running. Cars and lorries pass you very rarely. But there are many, many pedestrians with sledges, coffins, and corpses. That is the only traffic in this city. The shops are all shut, except for the bakers' shops and a few foodstores, but those are dark and empty. People are all bloated, frightful-looking, black, dirty and emaciated. Seven months have gone by. It seems like seven years. We've all aged. Young people have become so ghastly-looking, like old people, that it's simply awful to look at them. Very many buildings have been destroyed. Anyone who comes back here will find it hard to recognise their city. Yet none of it's as terrible as hunger. That was the last thing we were expecting, but it happened... If only we can survive all this! Then we'll value every crust of bread—not as before, when we didn't even want to look at it... And now our whole life depends solely on bread and water. Take today. There's no water anywhere, and no bread has been baked. The water tower's been destroyed, and there was no water for the bakery. There's been a delay, and we had to stand for four hours in this frost!

' "15th February 1942. The greatest misfortune of all. Someone stole the ration cards from Mother. That means nothing but death. It's still a long way to the first of next month. Without bread it's impossible to live. What can we do? When I came home from work and Mother told me the news, I just didn't know what to do. In a fit of temper I shouted at her, and then started howling. But that wasn't going to help. We went to the market and bought 500 grammes of bread, paying 150 roubles for it. Thank goodness they were selling it. But that can't be done every day, there's no way we'll have enough money. It would be good if they'd make some other foodstuffs available, but if they don't, it's going to be terribly difficult to get through this time. I'll do everything I possibly can, I'll spend all my money, and Fedya's, too, if only we can stay alive. And if we live, we'll get more money in time. Just so long as we survive! It's dreadful, but there's nothing to be done about it. I can't be angry with Mother. Probably that's our fate.' "

Apart from the three of us, there was also at the table in the room Yelena Averianova-Fyodorova's mother, a little woman with an aura of quiet old age. She reminded one of a tree whose foliage is shining and radiant

in autumn. Silent, listening with attention, as a child does to a terrible story when he already knows that, all the same, everything is going to turn out all right in the end...

EVERYONE HAD A SAVIOUR

A great many stories we took down show how people survived although all the odds were against them and logically they should have died. One of the women we talked to, *Alexandra Arsenyeva*, expressed this miracle as follows: "Everyone had a saviour." Not only in the sense that many survived because at the crucial moment someone came and helped them up in the street, returned a lost ration card or shared his last piece of bread. There was a more complex interdependence.

People remained alive because they were kept going by feelings of love, duty and devotion—towards a child, a loved one, their city.

As *Zoya Yershova* (19 Martynovskaya St.) says:

"What saved us all (well, I don't know about all) was hope and love. Well, I loved my husband, my husband loved his family, his daughter. He was serving in the army nearby. When we sat down to eat something, his photograph was there before us, and we were expecting him to come back. And it was only because of that love, because of that hope that we were able to keep going. It was really difficult. Now I can't imagine how we survived."

In saving others they saved themselves. Even when they died they still helped someone in their last moments. And if they survived it was because they were even more necessary to another person than to themselves. Here Alexandra Arsenyeva recalls that she owes her life to people who saved her. Saved her more than once.

"Who saved me? Just recently I found the person who, I could say, was my saviour. She got me into the Komsomol regiment. I found her purely by chance—she came from the Altai area for a reunion of old school-fellows.

"But my first saviour? I don't even remember his surname, but I know (we worked together) that he was a chauffeur. Who he drove about I don't remember now, but I know his name was Sasha. He was a very likable young man. Once he came round to see a woman with whom his nephew was staying, for he'd decided to take the child back with him. He brought her some spirit, a little buckwheat and of course some wood for heating. And there they were, sitting at the table, eating some sort of soap-like cheese. And I was lying down. Sasha looked towards me and said: 'Who's that you've got there?' 'We found her unconscious after the bombing. I don't know who she is.' But I recognised Sasha and managed to say feebly: 'Sasha!' He came over to me, looked and said: 'Alexandra Mikhailovna! Is that you?' I said: 'It's me, Sasha.'

"Then he went to work (they'd written me off there as a missing person) and told them where I was. They came and took me home on a sleigh, and gave me a medical certificate. I was barely alive. The girls at work were very good to me. They used to come and undress me (my dress was from No. 12,* Nevsky Prospekt, it was silk, a golden colour), wash my dress (and I'd be lying naked) and put it on again when it was dry. It seemed that everyone who came washed the dress. I was always wearing clean clothes, and so I didn't get lice. At work I was still considered the chief accountant. But what kind of a chief accountant was I if I kept thinking of bread all the time? And I took my daughter to work with me."

How many similar cases we came across. Each case might appear an occurrence on its own, but when you listen to so many you begin to understand what was behind it all.

"I was walking with Larissa (my friend Lena's daughter) across Bavarsky Bridge, the one by the Red Bavaria Factory, when a sailor came up and said: 'Here you are, girlie, take this from Uncle Vanya!'—and gave her a kilogram tin of American stewed meat. We rushed home and the four of us ate it without even bothering to heat it up," recalls *Vera Pavlova* (52 Boyarov St., Tosno).

Things like this are always remembered down to the last detail, inscribed forever in the memory: the Bavarsky Bridge, the unknown sailor and how they ate the meat, which may have saved their lives, and Larissa and Kolya, who are now grown up and have children of their own. And when Vera Pavlova goes to see her friend Lena, who now helps look after Larissa's children, they remember the sailor on Bavarsky Bridge, and the grandchildren know about him, too, although they have never seen him.

"At the end of November we lost our bread coupons," Zinaida Ostrovskaya wrote to us. "We had no stocks of food, that loss could have proved fatal. In the next apartment the Ivanenko family lived. Apart from the four adults, the family of the daughter-in-law from Luga was stranded there with three children. The younger daughter of the Ivanenkos was married to a senior lieutenant who had been killed in the first few days of the war..."

And we see the formation of a chain linking saviours and saved: sailors who themselves were living on starvation rations, would from time to time bring foodstuffs ("at the time everything was counted out in grammes") for the family of a dead comrade, and some of it would be given to the neighbours now and again, at some critical moment... ("Valentina Ivanenko ... brought us a glass of rice. Today you can't imagine what that meant then. And, after all, she had eight hungry mouths to feed. I shall never forget it. Of that family only Irina and the daughter-in-law with the children—who was evacuated in February—survived.")

Similarly, a nameless stranger out of the blue—this time a soldier—saved *Maria Yershova*. He came to see her at the outpatients' clinic and com-

* A well-known Leningrad fashion house.

plained of an upset stomach. She asked him what he had been eating, and he told her—horse-meat.

"I had always been very shy, and here for the first time I asked this man if he could get me some horse-meat. He said: 'Doctor, you don't mean to say you'd eat horse-meat?' He asked for my address and brought me a large piece of horse-meat. Well, I took it and then shared it with my neighbours."

She spoke of it with wonder. Such a long time had gone by and it still seems amazing, maybe even more amazing than when it actually happened. She thought for a little while and recalled that there had been another person who had saved her without giving her any gifts, by sharing something completely different with her.

"I was then already receiving a worker's ration. But even so I'd sold all I had at the market. My pay was decent for those days, I was, after all, a doctor. And I only had to get things for myself. My children had been evacuated. But all the same I was dying. A neighbour saved me at that time. She's dead now. But I see her daughter Alla now and again. Once I just didn't go to work—I couldn't. Then my neighbour discovered that I was lying at home and couldn't get up. There was nothing to eat. No heating whatsoever. She took me into her room—we lived in the same flat. Polina was a little stronger than I was. She used to find some firewood, break it up, drag it home and heat up the place. Her daughter must have been about six. Polina kept us warm, gave us hot tea. And then I got pneumonia. She would go to the market to change black bread for a little bit of something sweet. Once her daughter left her a little piece of bread—she didn't eat it herself, she loved her mother. And Polina kept that piece for a very long time, didn't eat it. Eventually, though, she did."

Nobody could have preserved even a small piece of that Leningrad bread as a souvenir, however precious, however sacred it might seem. But we still tried to clarify matters.

"Why did your neighbour take you in? What made her do it?"

Maria Yershova thought for a while. At first she said:

"We lived in the same flat." Then she said: "We were friends." Then she found some more important, vital thought in that: "And we're still friends. My granddaughters are friendly with her grandchildren, go to see them, and they come here."

Her thoughts went back to the beginnings of that friendship, to its unique origin. The ordeals of the blockade seemed to have made the life stories of both women more glorious, the decency and nobility of their conduct in the blockade period became a matter of family pride. At any rate it would appear to be so in many old established Leningrad families.

Stable, firmly-knit working collectives such as the Kirov Works, the Public Library, the Metal Works and the militia also considered reputations established during those blockade years synonymous with decency and honour.



Maria Yershova, 1945.

Historian *Tatyana Tokareva* knows and remembers the happy moments of her blockade life and links them all with the same thing—the mutual help, kindness and goodness that came your way, or you yourself were responsible for...

“Well, we didn’t have a *burzhuika*. We had a flat, but we didn’t have one of those little makeshift stoves. There was a large stove, in which we burnt classical encyclopedias and so on. They made poor firewood, but we got them burning in the end. Once we were carrying bread. To cut things short, Mother and I had got the bread, and on the way back a stove-maker was walking towards us, carrying a stove. We asked him about it. He said: ‘I’ve already sold it. If you like, come to my place.’ We did. It was in Belevsky Field. We arrived and went into his flat. He had eight children.

“On top of that he had a niece, and half the children were already able to do no more than remain lying down, that is, because of hunger, they weren’t getting up at all and were very weak. He himself was still on his feet and so was his wife. Yes, he let us have that stove. But we were in the position where, you might say, there was no reason for us to go home. My father lay at home, lay there dead, and we were unable to bury him, there was nothing we could do... And the stovemaker said: ‘You know what? It’s warm here. Stay with us. You have nothing to eat, and we have nothing to eat, but at least it’s warm here.’

“So we stayed there. My mother and I stayed there. He made us beds on the floor, right there with his children, all eight of them. His wife fetched firewood from some ruined building, and the stove was kept going all the time. We all lay virtually in a row. What could we talk about, ex-

cept how to make tasty dishes! But we talked for a very long time—all night. And we stayed there for three days...

"So we stayed there. Then we decided to go and see whether there was any post at home..."

"Who were you expecting post from?"

"...My husband was at the front... We wanted to get the papers and on. We got home, and there were no papers. And the neighbour opposite explained: 'Some army man came and took the papers. But we told him you'd died, because you hadn't been here for three days (that was already the usual thing—if people weren't at home for three days, it meant they were dead). But all the same he said he'd come back.' In fact that was my husband. He came back again. He came from the front, without any warning, with a sack on his back, with condensed milk, millet, and so on. And the first thing we decided to do was to go to that stovemaker. It was, of course, all on the spur of the moment. So we went there with some food..."

"We stayed there with him till evening. Well ... it's just a slightly sentimental story. The stovemaker was very pleased. He was a clever, interesting man. He was one of those bright people who had recently moved to the city, they'd come from a village somewhere. It was such a big family... Eight children! Well, a lot of time went by. My mother was a schoolteacher. After the blockade we returned to Leningrad, and my mother, naturally, went back to her school (in the Volodarsky district of the city)—that was probably in 1946. Some boy came up to her at school and said something ... well, he started to say, 'I'm very glad to see you,' and that 'Dad said so much about you.' Well, we learnt about the fate of the family. The father had died, as had four of the children. Only four of the boys had survived.

"It was very touching that this family remembered us, and in fact the whole story was moving—that we'd been there, and stayed, and had talked together. They'd accepted us into their family, when we were so wretched, in such a terrible state—and somehow it was all very moving. I'd rather not go into details..."

They'd discovered others, and discovered themselves—their better selves. Life during the blockade brought to light the most repressed and hidden human faults that in ordinary peacetime life were often camouflaged by fine words, smiles, assurances, ability to be liked by everyone, to be the life and soul of a party, etc. But the reverse also happened. The silent, sullen, abrupt, not very courteous façade opened up to reveal a great willingness to help, to display tenderness, love and compassion!

Olga Mikhailova, who works at the Hermitage Museum, told us:

"The blockade bound us so closely together that to this day we can't untie the knot. The blockade revealed people completely, as if they were naked. You could straightaway see all the negative and positive sides of a person. A basic goodness, the good side of people, flourished like luxuriant blooms. I could tell you about Anna Sultan-Shah, from the Oriental Department. She's still working. For over fifty years she's been at the Her-

mitage. She's done so much for the Hermitage. And during the blockade she took it upon herself to look after her elderly colleagues there."

"And how old was she?"

"She was middle-aged. (She's now over eighty.) But how she looked after them, how she tried to save their lives (well, it may seem a bit high-alutin, but you could put it that way): giving them hot tea, going and visiting them if they didn't come in to work, going and getting them their bread ration, helping in other ways. And she wasn't any better off than the rest of us. She had no extra privileges, she worked just like everyone else did. It's amazing, she's still the same, although you'd say she's even rather severe in appearance. You wouldn't see how kind she is straight-away. But if a person had any bad inclinations he remained bad, maybe even got worse. A greedy person would certainly try to live at the expense of others. But those who didn't think only of themselves didn't get like that, they shared their last with others."

Taisia Meshchankina, already known to us, tried hard to convince us (she herself was convinced of it) that the blue eyes of the girl who always rushed to meet her from the courtyard (a neighbour's daughter) were not just *like* the eyes of a little girl she had picked up in the snow. They *were* the eyes she remembered from blockade time.

"A woman was walking about thirty paces in front, and behind her was a little girl. The girl kept falling down and struggling up again. She was about five. I was walking along on the side where the Progress Factory is. My daughter was at nursery school. And that little girl would slip, then get up and stagger on, leaning onto house walls. And that old woman (she might have been as much an old woman as I was) would turn round and glance at her, then go on again. Why didn't she pick the child up? I crossed the road (No. 13, opposite the nursery school) and picked up the child. And she looked at me like this. She had such especially beautiful eyes. It was a little girl in a grey fur coat, and a grey fur hat. There was a most bitter frost. Where I got the strength, I don't know. I took the little girl in my arms and took her to the nursery school where my daughter was.

"The nursery school matron asked: 'Where are you taking her?'

" 'I couldn't just leave her out in the cold,' I said.

"Just as I was carrying her in, the child said, 'I'm hungry.'

"There was a smell of bread and soup there. I said: 'I couldn't do anything else, please excuse me! Take my daughter's ration and give it to her.'

"I don't know why I couldn't act otherwise that time. I didn't do anything else for her."

But let us now return to that anonymous person, the passerby. Who was the person who helped *Lydia Okhapkina* to pull her sledge, the main thing on it being a food parcel sent by her husband from the front? *Lydia Okhapkina's* story is a special one, it is a pity not to give it in full, but it is such an appropriate example.

It was evening and it was getting dark. She had been walking about all

day dragging the sledge behind her, going through the formalities connected with her departure, her life-saving evacuation, and now she had to go home to Vasilievsky Island from Chaikovsky Street.

"I found it very difficult to drag along the suitcase and parcel, and my last strength was ebbing. As soon as it got dark the streets of Leningrad became deserted. The streets were empty, silent, there was a snowstorm and it made walking even more difficult. The roadways and pavements were covered in thick layers of snow. That winter there was nobody clearing it up. My feet kept sinking in the snow and it was as much as I could do to move forward. I kept stopping and trying to get my breath back. I was soaked through, I could feel the sweat running down my face and my back. I started counting my steps. One, two, three and so up till ten, then I would stop and have a rest. Again one, two, three—and then another stop. I compared myself to a worn-out horse being spurred on by a whip but still unable to move a step. Once when I stopped for a breather I just couldn't move at all afterwards. I leant against my load and with horror wondered what on earth I could do. It was one o'clock in the morning. Not a soul in the street. I'd been walking along the Neva embankment, keeping my distance from the houses: I was afraid someone might come out of a house, from under the archways, kill me and take my parcel away. And then my poor children would cry for a long time, and would die because I did not return. My heart was breaking at the mere thought. They hadn't had anything to eat since eight in the morning, they were in a cold, unheated room, in the dark. And here I was, in the street, and I couldn't get to them. What on earth could I do? Knock on someone's door and ask for help? I looked around—it was dark. And anyway, who'd come and help at this time of night? More likely to bump me off and take everything. No, I'd somehow have to manage myself. I moved the sledge a little. Started counting again: one, two... Then a woman appeared as if from nowhere, came up to me and said: 'Let me help.' I was overjoyed. She took the rope and pulled it after her, telling me to push from behind. I couldn't keep up with her. She continued pulling it by herself. I started worrying that she might go off with the sledge. I started shouting: 'Stop! Wait for me!', but she went on without turning round. I tried to run after her but fell down immediately. I lay there thinking: there you are, she'll take it all and you'll die of cold. I looked up; she had already disappeared. I got up, walked on slowly and saw my sledge—and everything was still there as it had been. I was very glad and was filled with gratitude to her. I took the rope and started pulling it myself again. I got to Liteiny Bridge, that's where I wanted to cross. I was puffing and panting, wet with perspiration, and my heart was thumping madly. But the bridges were guarded. There were two sentries with rifles by the bridge and they wouldn't let me across. How I entreated, begged, and wept! But they kept saying the same thing: 'You can't go across.' They suggested going around a longer way. But I couldn't, I had no strength at all left. Here, by the sledge, I'll freeze, I thought. It meant our departure will be put off for a second time. The first time I'd lost my little son, but now I just couldn't move. Weak and alone, with not a human being in sight, I was half sitting, half lying on the sledge in a street on one side of the Neva while the children were on the



*Lydia Okhapkina and
her son Tolya, 1939.*

other. Were they still alive? Maybe they'd already died calling for me in the cold dark room. With that thought I leapt up. I must get down to the Neva. But the snowstorm had obscured the path down completely and I couldn't find it. I left the sledge on the bank, got down and tried walking across, but almost immediately sank knee-deep into snow. I got back up to the bank. Suddenly I saw a lorry. I started to shout: 'Help! Help!' It stopped. They asked what was the matter, and I explained. It was an army lorry. One of the soldiers put my sledge into the back, helped me get in and we moved off. We didn't go very far. The main thing was that they'd got me to the other side of the river. They had to go in the opposite direction. They were in a hurry, and from their preoccupied faces I could see they couldn't spare me much thought. But I'm still very grateful to them. Then I managed very very slowly to get myself home. It was three o'clock in the morning by then."

Throughout the whole of Lydia Okhapkina's story there is a chain of such helping hands, of rescuers, pulling her on, returning her to life.

Everyone had a saviour. They appeared out of the darkness of cold streets, they came into flats, they pulled people out from beneath debris. They could not feed anyone, they were starving themselves, but they spoke to people, picked them up, gave people a shoulder to lean on, held out a hand. They appeared at that very last, extreme moment when a person leaning against a wall had just slid to the ground, when a person had sat down on some entrance steps and could not find the strength to get up

again. It was one of those special instants on the brink between life and death, the instant of a last solitary breath—as Tvardovsky wrote, it was

*that desperate weariness
urging a welcome for death.*

And here it was only another person who could help, only someone else who could bring you back, keep you in this life. People needed someone who would help them even the slightest bit because “everything you could do yourself you’d done, but now you just couldn’t do any more”. And someone would come up, give you some of their strength, and this strength often helped you to crawl back from the pit.

“This is what I remember,” said *Nil Belyaev*, “I was on sick leave for a time—January and February of ’42. I went to the outpatients’ clinic during the day and was given the go ahead to return to work. Well, of course they hadn’t given me any kind of treatment, I just rested and regained a little of my strength. The thing was that I didn’t just have a cold. My kidneys were playing me up. Working on defence works, in the damp trenches—I got inflammation of the kidneys, and later on stones in the kidney, and then I was troubled by cholic. If you’ve never had it, just pray you continue that way. It’s just terrible. I got it for the first time in January and I was on sick leave. When I was a little better, I decided to go to work the same day I had visited the clinic. I wanted to see what was happening there. I knew there was practically no one there now. At that time I worked with a friend of mine—a very good friend, an elderly man, Dmitri Vorobyov. And I wanted to see him, to find out how things were going because it was difficult for just one person to be doing all the work there.”

“Where were you working?”

“At the Radio Committee. It’s right here, on what’s now Malaya Sadovaya. It was then called Proletcult Street. This was at about three or four in the afternoon. In February, the twenty eighth of February nineteen forty-two... Just before I got to the Moscow Railway Station I felt I never would reach the Radio Committee. There was such a frost that afternoon that I thought I’d fall down and freeze. I decided to go back. I turned back, past Suvorovsky Prospekt and was near home—I lived on Nevsky Prospekt, No. 105. This happened outside No. 101. I leant against the wall to have a rest. Very carefully, so as not to fall down. Sand and earth were banked up to protect what used to be the shop windows. I thought: I’ll stand here, pull myself together. I can’t fall to the left or to the right because these banks will hold me up. But then I began to feel that I shouldn’t have stopped. It would’ve been better to make an effort and crawl home. Because as soon as you stopped and gave your legs a rest, there you were—stuck, because they just wouldn’t move any further. So there I was, standing in melancholy reflection. What could I do? And it seemed to me that the worst part of it was that my house was the next but one. I was by a hundred and one, which meant passing a hundred and three and I’d be outside a hundred and five. But, sad to say, Nevsky Prospekt was almost deserted, there were just a few emaciated people crawling along the street. But, to my joy, some woman came up to me. Still fairly young

and obviously in better shape than I was. She asked: 'What's the matter?' I said: 'What's the matter? Here I am and I can't move any further. And my house is so near.'

"And the fact that I'd said the house was near had a positive effect. If I'd lived somewhere far away she naturally wouldn't have begun to get involved. But as the house was next but one, she said: 'I'll try and get you there. Is there anybody at home?' I replied: 'My mother should be.' (My mother was still alive then.) So I put my arm round her shoulder. Gradually, very very slowly we got to the house. She more or less carried me up the stairs to the third landing. She rang the bell. The kind you pull, of course, not an electric one. There was no electricity at the time. Then she handed me over to my mother. Mother was frightened at first: what on earth was this? She thought I was really in a bad way. But when I got into the flat she saw I was still in the same condition as I'd been the last few months. (She was slightly better than I was at that time.) And she was glad. She thanked the woman, closed the door. When we'd gathered our wits we thought: why hadn't I asked her who she was, where she was from? Was she a local person? Had she come from somewhere or was she a Leningrader? Because I wanted to see her afterwards and somehow thank her for literally saving my life. But then, frankly speaking, there wasn't a very great hope of staying alive. That's why I stopped worrying about it. I thought I probably wouldn't survive, and maybe she was in the same condition, so there wasn't much chance of seeing her."

What could be more simple or more natural than helping someone to get up and getting him home? No it is only an indifferent, callous and totally egoistic person who wouldn't help someone in trouble. Today no one can understand that people passed by simply because they were literally helpless, that one hadn't the strength to hold out a hand and bend down to assist. It's hard to believe that it was a sheer impossibility, that a person wanted to help but hadn't the strength. The best way of understanding how difficult this was is not from the stories of those who did help, but from those who just could not help. It was they who revealed to us the helplessness of people to rise to such an apparently very simple deed.

Varvara Semyonova, who used to work on the trams:

"Once I was walking across from the Petrogradskaya Storona district. And a man fell down. You know, you could see he was a tall, well-built man. And he just lay there. He couldn't shout, but motioned with his hands. I went up to him. But what could I do? I couldn't do anything on my own. People just kept walking past. You know, they all looked so awful that they seemed to need propping up themselves. Then another time I was walking along and a woman was walking in front of me. And she fell down. Very thin she was. This time I just about managed to get her up. She helped a bit herself and so I got her up. 'Take me as far as that entrance,' she asked me. 'No, dear!' I said. 'Be thankful I got you up. I could fall down myself and nobody'd pick me up. I've got you up, so you'd better try walking.' And it was very slippery. It wasn't just that the

ice hadn't been sprinkled with sand, it hadn't been broken up either, that's how it was."

"Where were you going that time?"

"I was walking to Krestovsky Prospekt. You know it was all on foot then. And why did I go? Because there just wasn't any firewood. My brother was a tailor and he had a really long table, like a carpenter's bench. Made of thick planks. I kept taking these one by one. My grandson would bring home some sticks. And that is how we kept the *burzhuika* going and dried the bread on it. Everyone knew his turn. One of us would go off, and somebody else would take his place. We had to dry the bread."

"Why did you dry it?"

"We dried it because we thought this way we got more out of it somehow. We'd pour hot water over the dry bread, add salt and a little pepper, and drink this water. Then you'd add more water, gulp it down and only after that you'd have the soaked bread as a sort of second course. And we got so into the habit that we continued eating like this even after the blockade—first all that was liquid, and then solid food."

There was lack of feeling, cold-heartedness too, ration cards were stolen, other people's pieces of bread were snatched, the dying were robbed ("Get on and die, just give me your ration cards!"), all manner of things happened, but that is not what is amazing—what is amazing is the number of cases of people helping others as in Belyaev's case. We heard so many stories like his. There were so many of these unknown passersby. They disappeared after saving someone's life, dragging them away from death's door, they disappeared without trace—without even time for their appearance to leave its mark on people's numbed minds.

One might wonder why they should bother, those unknown people—they were under no obligation, had no family ties with those they helped. They did not expect fame, or anything in return. Was it compassion? But death was all around, and people would walk past corpses with indifference, surprised at their own insensibility. Most people say this about themselves—the death of someone very close and dear to them did not seem to affect them deeply, some sort of defence mechanism came into play—they did not take it in at all, had no energy to spare on grief. But still they helped. There was a heightening of a different feeling—a sense of comradeship with their fellow citizens, and, in addition, being in a front-line city gave people that urge to help one another that is typical of the soldier. Everyone felt to some extent that they were in the frontline and did not simply help a passerby who'd fallen down but a fellow soldier. The army was fighting close by, somewhere near the tram terminal in the city, and the laws of soldierly honour became the laws of the city as well.

"There were corpses in each flat. And we weren't afraid of anything. Before this, would you ever have gone in? It's unpleasant when there's a corpse... A whole family died in our flat, and there they just stayed. And it was a long time before they were moved into the shed!" (*Maya Babich*).

"Dystrophy sufferers have no feelings of fear. Corpses were thrown out

onto the slope that runs down to the Neva from the Art Academy. I would calmly climb over the mound of bodies... You'd think that the weaker a person was, the more frightened he'd be, but no—fear disappeared. If this had happened to me in peacetime I'd have died of fright. And even now—no lights on the stairs and I'm scared. As soon as people started eating the fear came back" (*Nina Laksha*).

Any remaining reserve of sympathy was devoted to the living.

Some exceptionally powerful feeling made people give a hand to those who were slipping into oblivion. To lead them as far as their own home was an act of heroism at that time. Often it was the only thing a person could do for another. Frequently one's last strength went into this self-sacrifice. A simple thing like that, the most elementary thing, you might think, was perhaps one of the most magnificent manifestations of humanity. Why did people do it? For themselves, for their conscience, to be able to feel like a human being. In order to stand up to the enemy, not to give in.

The Anonymous Passerby is an example of the mass altruism of the blockade period. It revealed itself on days when everything seemed lost, in extreme, desperate conditions, but was all the more genuine for that.

Most of the saviours remained anonymous. But some were discovered. Only the faint outlines of their characters emerged by chance in narratives which only mentioned, only sketched a life that deserved research and a detailed story.

His name was Nikolai Ivanovich. Surname—perhaps Lebedev. Probably Lebedev. A child's memory cannot be relied upon. *Irina Kireyeva* (now working at the Hermitage) was then fourteen. She has no idea how many children there were in the hospital Lebedev organised. He collected up the starving children in the Dzerzhinsky district, was continually getting things done for them, obtaining some sort of little extra rations for them.

"We were saved because my cousin and I both found ourselves in Nikolai Ivanovich's hospital. He filled to the limit all the warm rooms that could possibly be heated. I remember that often when the children were brought there they were so emaciated that they couldn't eat. What struck me too was the fact that children of three and a half became really grown up... It was frightening. This was December, and people were already starving. In September-October they dropped incendiaries on us. That was when we children were still keeping watch on the roofs. We had a very unconcerned attitude towards it. Somehow, it all seemed so curious to us... A different period was now setting in. I remember twins being brought in... And their parents sent them a small parcel: three biscuits and three sweets. Sonya and Seryozha, those were their names. The little boy gave his sister a biscuit and took one for himself, he then divided the other biscuit into two. This left some crumbs and he gave them to his sister. And his sister said to him: 'Seryozha, it's so difficult for men to endure wars, you eat the crumbs.' They were three years old."

"Three?!"

"They could hardly talk, yes they were three, those tots! And later the

little girl was taken away, but the boy stayed. I don't know whether they survived or not..."

We should try to find out more about him—who was he, Nikolai Lebedev?* How did he manage to do it all? To collect all possible information which is not yet irrevocably lost, for this was a man who saved hundreds of children.

We came across many of them in the stories: workers at district education offices, doctors, teachers, fighters in Komsomol detachments, members of sanitary squads, those were the saviours to whom thousands and thousands of Leningraders owed their lives. Many of them deserve a story to themselves. We ought to have searched for information about them, but all we could do was to snatch at the name as it appeared momentarily on the scene, in order to rescue them if only by this from oblivion...

They saved people in various ways. Often just plain concern saved people. Before the war, *Maria Shchelyvanova* took in a little boy, Valeri. (There is a separate story about him later on). She was working in a housing office and had no opportunities to get anything above the rations. And she had taken on the extra responsibility of being a blood donor as she wanted to help the front in some way.

"Anyway, it was like this. As soon as I got back Valeri appeared: 'Auntie Musya! I've moved in with you.' 'Well,' I said, 'all right.' Added to which my husband had a niece who was a student at the Technological Institute. She was already in her third year and had got married. Her husband was an engineer and he was sent to Barnaul, they'd only had three months together. And this Nina was sent to dig the trenches. Valeri was in my room (the room was 12 square metres, smaller than this one), and now Nina too. She had a room in a hostel near Lesnoye, but she didn't even go there—came straight to me. She was from Novorossiisk. She had a broad face, not quite Russian, and very thick black plaits. So Nina turned up, really wasted away—no cheeks, nothing, she'd changed so much at those trenches. She couldn't even speak properly. I said: 'Nina, have you got a ration card?' 'Yes, I've got cards,' she said. 'And did you get the bread?' 'Aunt Musya, I've eaten the bread for three days ahead.' For three days ahead! And I only had the bread for that day, I didn't allow myself to get bread for the days ahead. I said to her: 'Well, take your coat off, Nina, you're going to live right here.'

"There I was—first Valeri, now Nina. And what kind of food reserves did I have? I'll tell you. Unlike some other people I hadn't stocked up. I didn't even have anywhere to keep it. I had one cupboard that had to do for all kinds of things. I'd been living without planning ahead too much—so I never had anything stocked. But once, right at the beginning, I was walking along and I saw a vendor selling 500 gramme packets of rice. There

* After the publication of the book in the magazine *Novy Mir*, we received a letter from D. G. Basanevskaya, in which she says: "I knew Nikolai Lebedev very well ... and he was a wonderful man and doctor..."

was nobody else about. I went up and asked: 'Could I have half a kilo?' She said yes. I took my half kilogram. But then I stopped and thought that she'd have maybe given me more. No, I thought, if I take an extra one somebody won't get any. Anyway, I set off firmly for home and shoved the rice behind the stove for an emergency reserve, very high up so that I couldn't reach it. Well, Nina was nearly mad from hunger, and I didn't know what to do. I said: 'Nina, I'll give you my bread for three days' (as a donor I got a worker's ration, but I shared it with Valeri too), 'that'll sort your rations out and you'll be like everybody else.' "

"And did donors get anything else extra apart from the bread?"

"You know, at that time they didn't give anything extra. Nina came to me in October. Then—the whole of nineteen forty-one—they didn't give anything extra apart from the worker's ration. That's how I sorted her rations out. She was very strange then, and kept on about buying a dog. I said: 'What's that, Nina, about you wanting to buy a dog?!' 'I want to eat it.' So she kept going round all the markets.

"Well, our neighbours were both elderly women and they smoked a lot, and they started her smoking. And I'll tell you about these neighbours. They were old maids. They exchanged bread for tobacco. They could see that I was giving bread to Nina as well as Valeri. So they thought I had special ways of economising. Anastasia Alexeyevna even used to say: 'How clever of Maria Ananyevna! If we'd known that donors got a worker's ration, we'd have become donors too.' And there was one time when I was truly embarrassed. They had a big plate especially for bread; they put a small piece of bread on it about this big and brought the plate to me together with a knife about this size and said: 'Maria Ananyevna, you're so good at portioning bread. Lena and I are always talking of how well you can divide it up. Would you portion out this piece of bread for us.' Well, of course I didn't say that I'd no special method of dividing up bread. I said: 'Give it to me.' I took the knife and cut it: 'This is for morning, this for dinner and this for supper.' 'Thank you, Maria Ananyevna, thank you so much.' And off they went with the plate. Then the two old dears moved to their brother's in Sovietskaya Street and died of hunger there. Such were our neighbours. We had good neighbours. We lived together quite happily—five rooms, twelve people. There were never any sharp words between us."

And here again: it was simply a matter of portioning bread, cutting it into three pieces, in fact simply a symbolic thing, no more than a friendly gesture. And this encouraged people, helped them.

"But you know what happened to Nina? I haven't told you about the rice. One day she became ill. Oh, I haven't told you that my brother died from starvation at his wife's place. And so I buried him. It was really terrifying! Maybe I could tell you afterwards?"

"Yes, of course. Tell us about Nina first."

"About Nina? All right. She kept going round the markets trying to buy something or other but I didn't know about that. Once she got food poisoning and was dying—her hair stood on end, then her nails turned blue. She was dying! And I'd only just buried my brother. We took him to that awful cemetery, the Smolensky, where I saw so many corpses! I

was really and truly horrified at the thought that I'd have to bury her as well. Her stomach was really upset, she started being sick. I said to her: 'Nina, what have you eaten, tell me what's the matter?' And she told me this: 'I'm sorry, Aunt Musya. I went to the market and bought a little piece—this size—of butter. And I swallowed it on the spot.' It turned out to have been soap coated with butter. And she'd gulped it down. And now she was dying! Of course, there was no emergency ambulance service then. And then I remembered this rice, the half kilo. It was no time to think of medicines. She was dying, her hands were blue. I got the rice and boiled it. Gave her the hot broth which she drank and after that she ate all the rice. And she's still alive. I'll show you a photograph of her."

Those who saved people, who were concerned about others, who helped people, rescued them and pulled others along, those who had some responsibility, who spent their last ounce of strength carrying out their duties, who worked, looked after the sick, after relatives—these, strange as it may seem, were more often the ones who survived. Obviously, there is no pattern you can apply. They died, too. And all sorts of scoundrels survived. At the beginning of 1942 the Kirov district Party committee put Anna Kondratyeva in charge of public health. The district secretary, Yefremov, asked her to pay special attention to the nurseries, to children. Generations in Anna's family had worked at the Putilov Works (now the Kirov). All her relatives were in some way connected with the Kirov Works. All in all she'd calculated that her family had worked there three hundred years.

She began with the nursery attached to the factory. It appeared that somebody had allowed a number of employees to be fed from the nursery rations. It turned out that children died while relatives of employees got fed. They also found there had been some fiddling at the TB clinic.

A kind of polarisation seemed to be taking place among people. Either they acted honestly, according to their conscience, whatever the circumstances, or they would try to survive in any way possible at the expense of a relative, a friend—anybody. Human feelings and qualities—love, marriage, family ties, parental feelings—were subjected to a stiff test.

A special story was related to us by *Maria Mashkova*. In 1941 she had the task of evacuating the children of the employees of the Public Library, but the road had been cut and she soon had to return to Leningrad with the children.

"Among the children leaving with me was Igor—the little boy of a woman colleague—a lovely boy. His mother watched over him tenderly, with great love. During the evacuation she used to say to me: 'Maria Vasilyevna, give your children goat's milk too. I always get Igor goat's milk.' My children were living in a different barrack from me and I tried not to get anything extra for them, to give them no more than their ration. Months later Igor lost his ration cards. In April I happened to be walking past the Yeliseyev shop (at that time the dystrophy victims were already struggling

out into the sunshine) and I saw a boy sitting there—he looked terrible, a skeleton, yet bloated. ‘Igor, what’s happened to you?’ I asked. ‘My mother’s thrown me out. She said she wouldn’t give me another crust of bread.’ ‘How’s that come about? It can’t be!’ He was in an awful state. I barely managed to get home with him to my fourth floor flat, I could hardly drag him up. By then my children were already attending nursery school, and were still holding out. He was so frightful to look at, so pitiful! And all the time he kept saying: ‘I don’t blame Mummy. She’s right. I’m the guilty one, it was I who lost the ration card.’ ‘I tell you, I’ll get you into the school’ (it was about to open). And my son whispered: ‘Mummy, give him what I brought home from nursery school.’ I fed him and then went to Chekhov Street with him. We went in. The room was appallingly dirty. A ragged woman was lying there, already wasted with hunger. The moment she saw her son, she shouted: ‘Igor, I won’t give you a crust of bread! Get out!’ The room was stinking, filthy and dark. I exclaimed: ‘What are you doing? After all, it’s only three or four days and he’ll go to school, he’ll be better.’ ‘No matter! There you are, on your feet, and I can’t stand up. I won’t give him a thing! I’m lying here, starving...’ What a transformation from a tender mother to such a wild beast! But Igor wouldn’t leave her. He stayed with her, and later on I heard that he had died.

‘I met her some years afterwards. She was blooming, now quite healthy. When she saw me, she flung herself at me and cried: ‘What did I do!’ I replied: ‘What point is there in speaking of that now?’ ‘No, I can’t go on. I’m thinking of him the whole time.’ Some time later she committed suicide.’

The disintegration of a personality ended in tragedy.

The range of human passions during the blockade increased enormously—from the depths of total degradation to the loftiest display of conscience, love and devotion.

Whenever we tried to find out how people survived, how they did it, what helped them—in the overwhelming majority of cases it emerged that families grew closer together, helped each other. And in offices and factories people managed to form collectives, someone would demand and make others accept discipline, would not let people go to pieces. *Marina Tkachova*’s mother made her children clean their teeth all through the blockade. There was no tooth powder so they used charcoal. The fact that they didn’t eat their cat meant a lot to the family. They saved the cat. He looked terrible, his fur was burnt all over because he kept rubbing himself against the red-hot *burzhuika*. They didn’t eat their cat, and this—a purely childish memory preserved with pride through the years—was what Marina Tkachova mentioned first in her story. This kind of thing also gave people support, helped raise their self-respect. And from all the variety of stories we became aware that for most Leningraders the object was not to find ways of surviving but to find ways of living.

WHAT KEPT PEOPLE ALIVE?

Hunger tormented and killed children before their mothers' very eyes. And children saw the torments of their parents, although they probably did not completely understand them until many years later when they themselves became fathers or mothers.

*Magdalene wept tears of bitter anguish,
The best-loved disciple lay there as dead,
And to where His Mother stood in silence,
None dared turn a lowered head.*

(Anna Akhmatova)

We have a number of cases recorded in which both mother and child (the latter now adult) together remember the same things. Here is one such story from *Olga Moskovtseva* and *Valentina Gavrilova* (we shall call the daughter Valya).

Olga Moskovtseva:

"I was in the guard brigade and we were allowed to take firewood. I'd ask one neighbour, then another. We'd all gather up firewood, and they'd get it home—I'd take some too—and then quickly go on duty. Later on we'd chop up the wood and go off to the market—the Klinsky market was nearby. I couldn't stand there and sell any myself. I'd get Valya to do it. She was half-alive, and I'd brought her there on a cart, so that people'd see there was somebody selling the wood. And I'd stand there and watch. And you know we were very lucky one day. A woman came up to me and said: 'I'll give you a kilogram of millet.' "

Valya:

"A whole kilogram of millet! "

Olga Moskovtseva:

" 'A kilogram of millet. Don't tell anyone,' she said. 'I won't show you which is my flat. Just bring the logs to the block and leave them outside.' And I had to take the logs—and Valya, too—on our sledge. "

"You had the logs on the sledge and put Valya on top of them? "

Olga Moskovtseva:

"Yes, she couldn't walk then. Anyway, we got there, to her block, and were given this millet. Where could we put it? Valya cried out: 'They'll take it away, they'll take the millet away!' I said: 'All right, let's hide it inside your coat.' "

Valya:

"They used to take things away. "

Olga Moskovtseva:

"Yes, it often happened then. I hid the stuff in her coat and said: 'Sit on the sledge, or better still lie down on it. I'll take you home.' And so we got the millet home. Valya used it very frugally—she was boss in our household then. I'd come home from work, she'd pour me out some soup and count me the number of grains. She'd keep counting so carefully that

the soup got cold. I'd weep because I wanted warm soup after coming in from the cold but she'd keep on counting: 'The doctor told me not to give you any more than my share, it must be equal portions. Then we'll live.' You know, there was something wrong with her mentally."

Valya:

"Yes, I was a little crazy."

Olga Moskvotseva:

"She wasn't normal—couldn't remember anything."

"Which year was this? Before Ladoga?"

Olga Moskvotseva:

"Yes, that's it. Before Ladoga. I wasn't working on Ladoga yet. There was a munitions factory on Obvodny where my husband worked. And I was taken on in the guard-room there—I was already ill, I had a third category disablement. And it was from there that we got the wood. It was before Ladoga."

Valya:

"They used to give oilseed meal and oilcake then."

Olga Moskvotseva:

"I had some wool, and I'd knitted stockings and given them to the cook. I gave her all I had and in return she'd give me an onion or peelings. I'd make potato cutlets out of the peelings and yeast soup from the yeast. They gave me some glue later on. And I made a kind of jelly from it (from the same glue we use to stick things). I couldn't eat it but Valya did. She enjoyed eating this glue jelly."

"About the millet, did the doctor in the hospital tell her to count it?"

Olga Moskvotseva:

"Yes, yes. There was something wrong with her lungs, all the time there was something wrong. And so the doctor would give her soya milk. She'd come back and make a sort of coffee. I wanted her to have it and she wanted me to have it. So we'd sit and argue. 'If I don't have it, I'll die—and you will too. And if I have it and you don't—then you'll die, but I'll die without you too.' I had to give in to her and divide everything into equal halves. Another thing: she used to get the food. I'd see half a sweet left. I'd say: 'Valya, why didn't you eat it?' (I kept wanting her to eat more than myself.) She replied: 'No, no. How can you ask! I can only eat half of it. The doctor said we must have half of everything each. Have equal portions of everything. Then we'll both live.'"

Valya:

"The Leningrad radio used to tell people how to survive under those conditions: 'Don't eat all your hundred and twenty-five grammes of bread at once, cut it in half.' I had enough willpower to leave half. I used to hide this half outside the window because of rats and mice. But later on there were no more mice, cats or dogs—there were no animals left in Leningrad. I would divide it like this—half to eat in the morning, and the rest would be for the evening. I used to take notice of what the radio said."

Olga Moskvotseva:

"We had a kitten. I said—take him away, anywhere. But her godfather came round and said: 'Give him to me, I'll eat him.' Valya cried bitterly: 'What are you saying! You want to eat the kitten!' Then I persuaded a

neighbour—she worked as a conductor. I said: 'Listen, Katya, tell Valya that you'll take it to the canteen, that it'll live there and be fed. She'll get it back afterwards. Only she can't go there to have a look at it. When the war ends she'll have it back.' It worked."

Valya:

"And I also remember how anxious I was to live. I was ready to listen to anything anyone said, to take all advice in order to survive, if only I could survive! It seems incredible now. I can also remember the shop assistant who gave us our rations. There were occasions when we didn't get any—either there was no flour or the bakeries hadn't made any bread for some other reason. It did sometimes happen! But when everything was all right and the bread was delivered, the loaves were really large. I had the impression that they were huge. But there was sawdust added to the flour. And the woman behind the counter couldn't cut them with a knife, she had to use a chopper. I remember that very well. The baker's was in our block, number seventy-six. We lived through the blockade in it. And so she used a chopper to cut the loaves into very small pieces—a hundred and twenty-five grammes each. They didn't give bread in advance then, there were rarely occasions in Leningrad when you could get bread for the next few days at once. I had a dream then: 'Mother, to think there'll be a time when the baker's will be stuffed full of bread?!' I couldn't believe there'd ever be such a time. I never dreamt of buns or rolls, I would be content with just loaves of bread. And I'd say: 'We'll be so happy when that time comes!' I lived to see that time and saw shelves full of bread. But even now we use old bread to make rusks—we don't throw any away."

Olga Moskovtseva:

"She would say that we'd live in splendour when the time came and we had enough bread and salt (there wasn't any salt then either), and that we'd drink hot water with our bread and salt! "

Valya:

"I remember another incident. We lived right near the Varshavsky Railway Station: the Moskovskaya Zastava, a lot of factories and the Badayevsky Stores close by, too. That's why the area was heavily bombed. The Pulkovo Heights were nearby, and the Moscow district suffered a lot of shelling. I counted myself very lucky to be living on the ground floor when the bombing used to start because everybody from the higher floors would run down to us to hide. The ground floor wasn't usually considered very good—it was darkish down there and somewhat damp—but during the war it was the best floor. Maybe that's what saved us—many of the shells hit the third floor, even the second—and then everybody ran downstairs to us for safety. Mother used to dress me up like this at those times: she would take off my little coat and put hers on me because it was made of wool and had a fur collar, and was worth more than my child's coat. She would hang a little bag round my neck with both our ration cards in it and say: 'You never know what might happen. For the first month or so you'll have my ration cards, you can sell my things, my coat and you'll survive somehow. And maybe they'll break through the blockade and you'll be evacuated...' "

A Leningrad woman... She lived a little longer than it was possible to live, even if afterwards death, having withered her, took its toll. She hung on for a day, two days, a month—by her thoughts, her fears, her concern for her child, her husband...

"And another time, you know, I felt I was getting weaker and weaker. My hands and feet were so cold. Oh my god! I'm going to die, I thought. But what about Vova? And, you know, I'd get up and do something, I couldn't possibly explain it now" (*Alexandra Den*).

Many of them survived solely for that reason, despite the scientific calculations that someone lying still loses less energy than someone who crawls to the Neva to get water, someone who feebly pulls a sledge laden with firewood, or stands for twenty-four hours or more in a queue for bread for their child... Here science should have had second thoughts or remembered what had been forgotten. "I had to fetch food for myself and another five people who were sitting and waiting for me. I had to get the soya milk for the child and had to go to get the ration cards for the people who lived in the house. Altogether I had to be on the go the whole time, and probably that's why I survived. I scarcely became at all swollen. I think I was in bed for a single day during the blockade" (*Olga Rybakova*, engineer, working as the communal service manager, 12 Kutuzov St.).

Ye. S. Lyapin, D. Sc. (Maths and Physics) and a mathematics professor, who observed all this and lived through it all himself, put it this way:

"But there's something I'll mention, all the same, because it played its part for us and for many other people too. I spoke to doctors during that period and later they confirmed it. Because normally you'd imagine that a human being's something like a stove: while it's being fed firewood it stays alight, if there's no wood it's not getting any fuel. The wood's been burnt and the stove goes out. In the same way a human being is fed energy-building foods and he lives off this energy, he's active. But when there are too few calories coming in, then he uses what his body has stored up: fat, muscles. He uses all this up. When all this is 'burnt up' (any physicist knows the energy cycle) there's nothing to keep him going, and he dies. But often a person died when a small reserve of energy—in the simple, physical sense—remained in his organism. The stove could have gone on functioning, but he died. But a human being isn't really a stove! He is a very complex apparatus, extremely complex. And in that sense it was very important how a person behaved, to what extent he could fight. I remember people who at the beginning of the starvation period stopped washing, stopped shaving. And when they received food on their ration cards they would eat all the food on the spot, in the shop. And if they got bread in advance for the next few days too, they'd eat it all in one day and have nothing left for later. And these were not greedy people without any will-power—no, they were ordinary good people. They based their actions on the idea of that very stove: to be active, to move, a person uses calories, he is short of calories, so he must lie down and stay that way as much as possible. And that was a mistake because people are not stoves. True, when you walked about the room and even more so when you washed, especially with cold water, you used a certain number of calories. But in reality you continued to remain a human being that functioned to a certain extent.



"Many people made themselves stick to a strict routine, of course one that suited the conditions, and it was rigidly adhered to. During the worst period in the blockade dinner consisted of boiling water with no more than fifty grammes of inedible bread soaked in it. It was eaten from a plate, with a spoon. You might think I am talking nonsense—what did it matter when you ate your hundred and twenty-five grammes, whether you soaked it or not, ate it with a spoon or just any old how. But no, even that was important then. You had to build up some sort of daily rhythm that resembled the life of a normal person. I know this from my own experience and that of my relatives, and I have heard it from doctors, too, because they saw it all on a mass scale. Obviously that was no panacea. Naturally in the end no routine could help if people got no food at all, sooner or later they would die. I repeat, there was no guarantee, but it helped to ward off death for as long as possible. I must tell you that I tried to keep my thoughts, my feelings as normal as possible. To let myself go as a few people did—would have been wrong and mistaken."

We have two diaries from the Prusovs—the mother's and the son's. *Faina Prusova's*, the mother's, is especially interesting. A nurse with a striking personality and a tragic fate as a mother, she had a definite flair for writing. It was she who gave her son the idea of writing things down. He was a medical student, and when he was called up into the army she gave him a thick notebook and said: "Record the more interesting things because there is a saying, 'Even the bad records of a contemporary are of value to later generations.'" There are pages in the notes made by her son, Dr. Prusov, which touch on that same problem of calories, nutritional and, so to say, spiritual calories.

"My mother, Faina Prusova, was a nurse with many years' experience. She was once an operating theatre sister with Professor Grekov in the Obukhov Hospital. And later on she worked in the surgical department of the Sofia Perovskaya Hospital. We all survived thanks to her, because she somehow managed to raise everyone's spirits. We didn't give up: we washed in a primitive fashion, and somehow had baths. What was interesting was that she had her own theory which was proved in practice: not to keep lying down all the time. When, as a medical student, I tried to object, saying: 'But Mother, when you're lying down you use less energy so you need less food.' She used to say to me: 'It's paradoxical, but it's true—those who move about will work and live. So move about!' The time when I became so weak (this was in 'forty-two) that I didn't want to go to the institute, my mother and sister both said: 'You must continue your studies. You must! If you stop going there, you'll die!' So I kept going. I used to walk to Lev Tolstoy Square from the Field of Mars and back again every day, and I also made house calls and received patients in the Sofia Perovskaya Hospital.

"That's what my mother was like. And whoever came to see us, the flat was always clean. There was always a table-cloth on the table. The room had a cheerful air. Everything used to be clean and tidy. And this cleanliness, this kind of discipline was somehow passed on to us from our moth-

er. And I think this helped us to survive. Mother never let our spirits sink low. The ration was divided up and we each had a portion, and later my mother and sister confessed that during the hardest time they gave me a larger share than themselves—I didn't know why. But the most interesting thing was this—Mother thought that her room was clean, her floor was always scrubbed, everything sparkled, but after the blockade was lifted, she removed the blackout, looked at the wallpaper and said: 'Oh, my god! I've been deceiving myself! I've been living in all this filth! ..' "

From *Olga Epstein's* diary:

"May 5th. I went back to work after sick leave. The factory is working on another order for the army. There are very few people left. Almost none of the older workers. Some have died, but some have been evacuated. I'm learning to make new parts. I'm still wearing my winter coat. The present order is much more interesting than previous ones. Firstly, there is more variety in the parts, they require far more precision and, furthermore, are made of non-ferrous metals. Some 'oilcake pâté' was delivered to the canteen today and I was given a kilogram. I wouldn't have touched it before, but now it seemed tasty to me.

"May 13th. I visited Edik* today... I listen to the news from the Information Bureau in the evening, then go to the baker's for my 250 grammes of bread and maybe butter, if there's any. I spread it on the bread and enjoy it. Then I go to work. When I get home from work I boil some tea, drink it and go to bed. I work on my own, I do the jobs of foreman, inspector, unskilled labourer, work distributor, and others as well.

"We had a meeting at the factory today. Reviewed our output for May. We got through our quota.

"Today we also had a medical check-up. They diagnosed first category dystrophy in me. They started naming the worst cases of dystrophy for extra rations. I can't imagine my being one of them. My gums are already better. I was even surprised that I'd got off so lightly and my teeth are all in place. We all got a litre of soya milk today."

"June 10th. Our Party organiser came up to me today and said: 'Here's a medical certificate—go and see the doctor at once.' 'But why?' 'For extra rations.' "

A Leningrad woman fought desperately and fearlessly against starvation. This was her front of the war. Those people who survived in Leningrad are indebted not only to the army, not only to the Road of Life but to womanly patience, endurance, strength and love.

But even then she would have preferred not to have been the strongest and hardest, but to have been simply herself, a person on whom someone else would take pity. At times she found it almost beyond her to play the part of strongest and healthiest member of the family.

"I remember the following case. At one period we were given so-called soya sweets instead of sugar. Well, there wasn't so much soya in them as

* Her three-year-old son who was living in a children's home.

goodness knows what. And I shared them out between the three of us. I remember one or two occasions when I gave them my share and then went out into the hall. One of those times I went out and burst into tears. You know, now I am moderately indifferent to food—if it's there, it's there, if it's not—then it's not. But then... I still remember how I went into the hall and cried" (*Alexandra Den*).

Women—mothers and wives—had to be stronger, tougher and more courageous than their own selves.

LENINGRAD CHILDREN

"I came out of my courtyard next door to the G.H.Q. and there was a boy crouching by the gate. He looked about six. I asked: 'What are you doing here?' He replied: 'I've come here to die.' 'To die? Now look here—you've managed to get here, so you can't be dying! And where do you live?' 'On the Moika River. Our courtyard's very dark and so is our flat. But it's so light here.' (This was in the Palace Square.) 'So I've come here to die.' Well, I took him along with my girls to the Archives where I worked. We gave him warm water to drink and found him a few bits of stale bread and also some carpenter's glue. And he told us: 'If I stay alive, I'll always eat this glue.' "

"How old was he?"

"I thought about six. But it turned out he was eleven. I asked him: 'But why did you really come here? Haven't you any family left alive?' He said: 'But don't you understand? If there was anybody left, I wouldn't have come. Father's at the front and my mother's died, she's still lying there. And my little sister's died too.' Well, I took him to the children's department of the militia and gave them his address (he knew it), and they went there. And that's as much as I know about him" (from *L. Mandrykina's* story).

"Leningrad children..." When people heard those words—whether in the Urals or beyond them, in Tashkent, Kuibyshev, Alma Ata or Frunze—their hearts bled. War brought grief to everybody but especially to the children. And it hit them so hard that any adult would, with an involuntary sense of guilt, try to find a way of removing at least some part of the burden from their shoulders and taking it upon his own. It sounded like a password—"Leningrad children!" People in all parts of our land responded. Up till a certain time Leningrad's children were like any others, were still happy and inventive. They played with shell fragments, collected them (as they had collected stamps or sweet wrappers before the war). They would run away, get through to the frontline, as the front was so close, virtually next door. They would excitedly throw sand onto German

incendiary bombs in their yards, as if they were Christmas crackers.

"We drove further, to the Obvodny Canal," recalls former tram driver, *Anna Petrova*. "There on the Novo-Kamenny Bridge, children would sweep the bombs right into the water with brooms..."

V. I. Kolyagin: "Well, the boy decided that if he started running around shouting, no one would hear him. While he was running around the house would catch fire. He decided to jump from the higher roof to the lower one."

"How many storeys?"

"From the third to the first floor. Two storeys apart. He jumped and tossed the incendiary bomb down. We don't know his surname even."

But then they became the quietest children in the world.

"We were sitting there, and around us, around the school, 16 shells exploded! All the windows were broken. The youngsters all held onto me. But I felt I was trembling. I exerted every effort to stop that trembling. And, you know, I succeeded! I really did put everything I'd got into it! And furthermore, I convinced myself I wasn't in Leningrad but was now in Molodino, at my mother's, and that everything was fine" (*Nina Rogova*).

"Before me stood a boy of perhaps nine. He had some kind of shawl wrapped round him, and on top of that a quilt, and he stood there frozen. It was cold. Some people left, others took their places, but the boy still remained there. I asked him: 'Why don't you go home and get warm?' He replied: 'It's cold at home, anyway.' I said: 'What's the matter, do you live by yourself?' 'No, with Mum.' 'So what's the matter? Can't your mother come here?' 'No, she can't. She's dead.' I exclaimed: 'What do you mean, dead?' 'Mum died, and I was sorry for her. Then I had an idea. Now I put her in the bed just during the day, and at night I put her by the stove. It's all the same to her, she's dead. When she was in bed with me I felt cold" (*Z. Ignatovich*).

That winter Leningrad children forgot how to be naughty. They even forgot how to laugh, how to smile, just as their mothers and grandmothers had, and also their fathers and grandfathers, who were the first to die...

"People, even children—did not laugh and did not cry,"—many people remember that. As *Olga Bergholtz* said to "her" Leningraders, "...grief is greater than tears." And it seemed, even a smile required energy. But they were so short of energy, there was not enough for work, for living! When that terrible winter of death and starvation passed, *Lydia Usova* found herself smiling one day when someone had said something in her presence. She said she felt that "...something was happening to my face, its muscles were moving in an unusual way..." She was smiling again... (from *Usova's* story).

"I remember queuing for bread," a singer in the Leningrad Academic Choir, *Galina Marchenko*, was telling us, looking sadly deep within herself at thirteen-year-old Galya, a child in beleaguered Leningrad. "We had a big courtyard and you had somehow to walk round about one or two little houses to get to the baker's. I remember we would start queuing in the evening, and stand for twenty-four hours, and we used to dress up in all the clothes we had. Mother couldn't move at all, she'd grown weak quite

soon. She always had a few bricks warming, two or three of them, on the *burzhuika*. I used to put the warm brick against my chest to stay warm. I remember I'd get cold, stagger home, get another warm brick and stagger back with the little strength I had. I remember Mother would really make me warm with those bricks. In the end I'd get the hundred and twenty-five grammes of bread for each of us and go home."

"Did you ever laugh?"

"We didn't laugh, I don't remember it ever happening. We hardly ever spoke because we just didn't have the strength to. No, I can't remember myself laughing. I always had the ration cards because Mother was afraid of losing them: to lose them meant death."

"Did you cry?"

"No, no crying either, we were somehow indifferent. We even stopped going down to the bomb shelter, we just shut ourselves in our flat and stayed there."

"One woman we spoke to told us of her first smile after all her suffering and how surprised she was by those unaccustomed movements of the face muscles. Do you remember your first smile?"

"I don't remember the smile. I think I smiled only after I was evacuated. Maybe even before. No, after we went to live in Zhikharevo."

"Manager of the sheet music library of the Leningrad Academy Choir Concert Hall, *Alexandra Agronskaya*—a pleasant woman with dimples in her cheeks when she smiled—immediately became sad and serious when she started talking about the smiles that so rarely lit up children's faces. She lived in a children's home, her mother had been mobilised, her father was at the front.

"But how did children behave? Some must have eaten their ration all at once and some must have hidden it, is that right?"

"You know, I can only tell you that we ate very small pieces at a time. We never took bites out of the bread, we would pinch bits off and put them in our mouths. And in the dining room (we had a big dining room where all of us would eat) we all took turns to lick out the saucepans our food had been cooked in, mostly after porridge."

"Who worked out this rota?"

"The staff who were looking after us. There were so many of us children."

"Did you have a strict rota? Or was it for being good?"

"No, we each had a turn. You know, I don't think any of us was particularly naughty. So there was nothing to punish us for, we should've been braced up a bit. At any rate when I went to school... I remember my teacher's name when I was in my first year: Yelena Ignatyevna. It was school No. 202 in Zhelyabov Street. After the first time the whole of our class laughed at something—this must have been at the end of 'forty-four, for some reason the whole class laughed—she went to see all the parents to tell them all: 'Your children all laughed today!' It was the most important piece of news."

"Where was your children's home?"

"It was on Nekrasov Street. There was a sort of church on the outside, but inside the courtyard we had our children's home. During one of our

walks a shell damaged the building. The children were unharmed and we were all moved to another building.”

“But didn’t anything make you laugh in the children’s home itself?”

“I don’t think so, although we did dance. I was dressed as the Fox... I can also remember—we put on a performance called *The Snowmaiden*. And I played the Snowmaiden, even sang, but I don’t think it could have been very cheerful, not really.”

“Were all the children the same age as you or were there older ones?”

“Some were older, some younger.”

“And from the children’s home you later returned to your own home?”

“Yes, my sister and I both went to our flat from the children’s home.”

“And your father?”

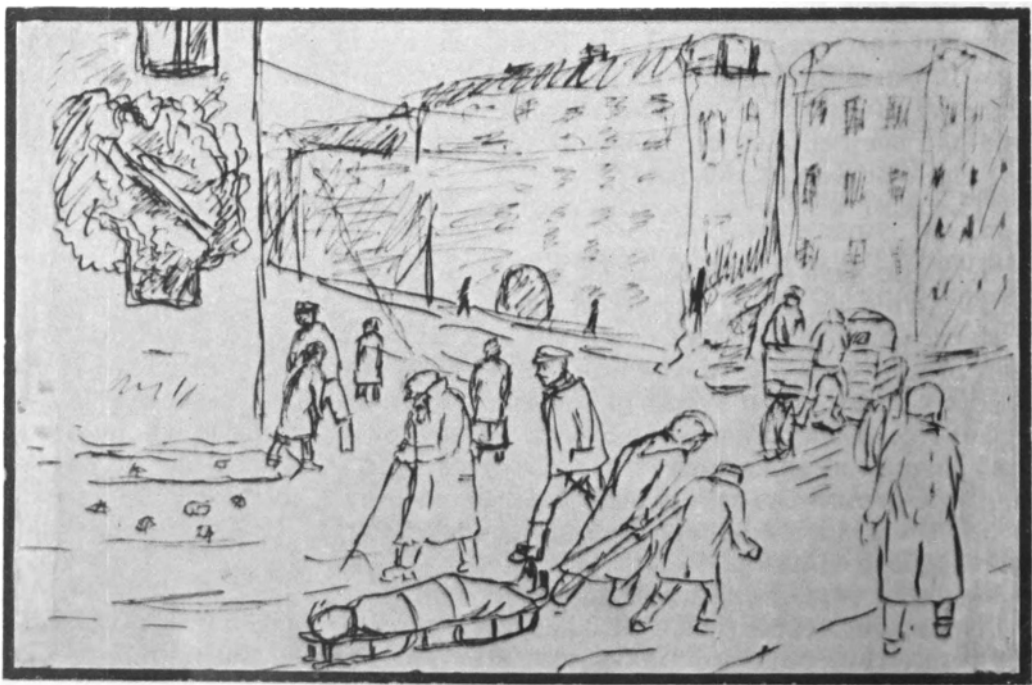
“My father died only recently. He went through the whole war. He was in Germany. And he then worked—I want to boast a bit here—he worked on various expeditions. Went on the *Ob* and the *Lena* to the Antarctic. There’s a bank in the Antarctic named after him.”

“Agronsky?”

“No, Pozharsky.”

“Why’s your surname different?”

“I got married, that’s why.” She laughed. “Of course there are many memories, mostly not very happy ones. I even thought the day the blockade was lifted was frightening. I was at home with my mother and sister. We lived right in the centre—in Sofia Perovskaya Street. The Griboyedov Canal was close by, everything was near—the very centre of the city. I hadn’t heard anything on the radio, no announcements, and nor had my sister. We



two and mother went into the street and we met a friend of my mother's. She was shouting something very very loudly, then she grabbed my mother and the two of them went off and left me and my sister. The next minute there was such a thud! You know, I hadn't heard a noise quite like that all through the war and hadn't had such an awful feeling that something was crashing down... The whole city lit up. It turned out that it was the firework salute! .. My sister and I just fell into a snowdrift. Two military men of some sort pulled us out of it. We cried like mad. It was as much as they could do to calm us down."

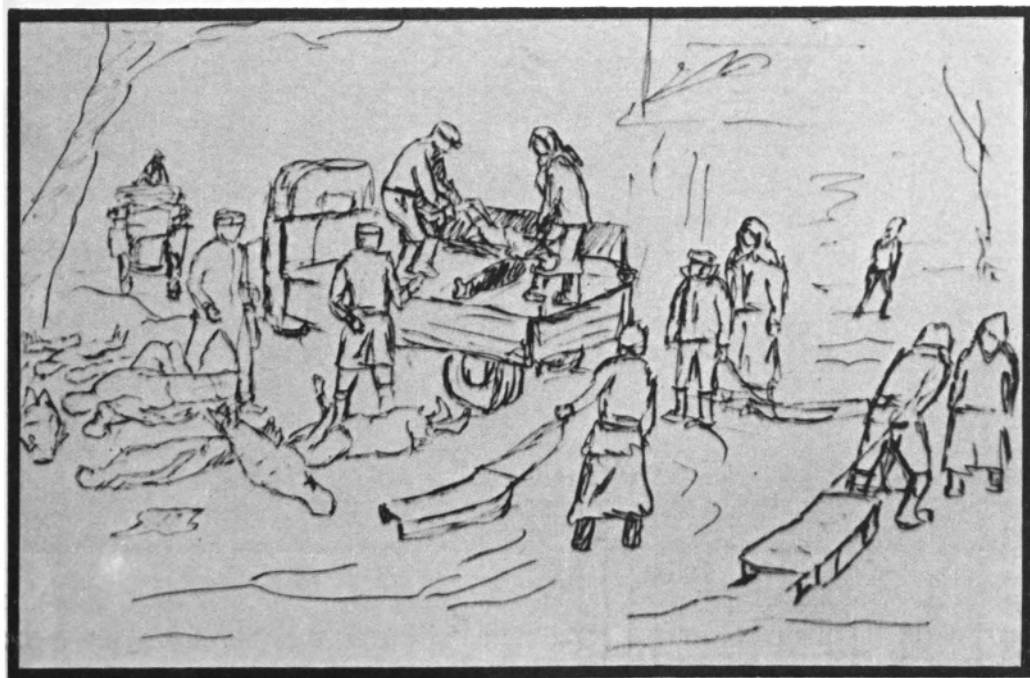
"You still didn't know what was happening?"

"No, we didn't understand what it was all about. We had no idea what victory meant. I think victory still had a very abstract meaning for children then. But by the time the blockade was lifted we were already eating a bit more, you know, we were given something even if it was skilly, and so I brought this skilly home from school in a cup, and we could eat it. We already felt things were better. And, of course, the day the blockade was lifted was most noteworthy, even though my sister and I were very frightened."

But we asked Alexandra to go back again to the teacher she had spoken of at the beginning. We could not stop thinking about her. She saw the children's first laughter as an event. An event so great, so crucial, that she went round to see all the parents. She bore this news to them as if it were a most valuable gift—they had laughed! They were laughing again!

"And so your teacher went and told all the parents that their children had laughed that day. How did you find out?"

"Our parents told us. I don't know anything of her life before the war,



I don't know anything of her family circumstances during the war. I have the impression that she lived solely for the school and for us. We came to school hungry and cold. She used to undress us to see what we had underneath. She would wrap up those who had nothing on in newspaper and then put their dresses on over it so that the children wouldn't freeze. If someone started to cry during a lesson she always seemed to have some little crusts in her pocket. She had a big cardigan with pockets at the bottom (maybe that's only the impression we got then). And so she would give us the crusts to suck, to stop us from crying. When the enemy guns were firing she would collect us all up in the corridor and literally shield all of us with her body. She came to see us at home very often. If one of the children didn't appear in school one day she would go round to his or her home the same day. How she herself felt, of course, I don't know. I don't know if she had a family or whether she was on her own because I only had her for my first and second years and the beginning of the third."

"And you don't know what happened to her after that?"

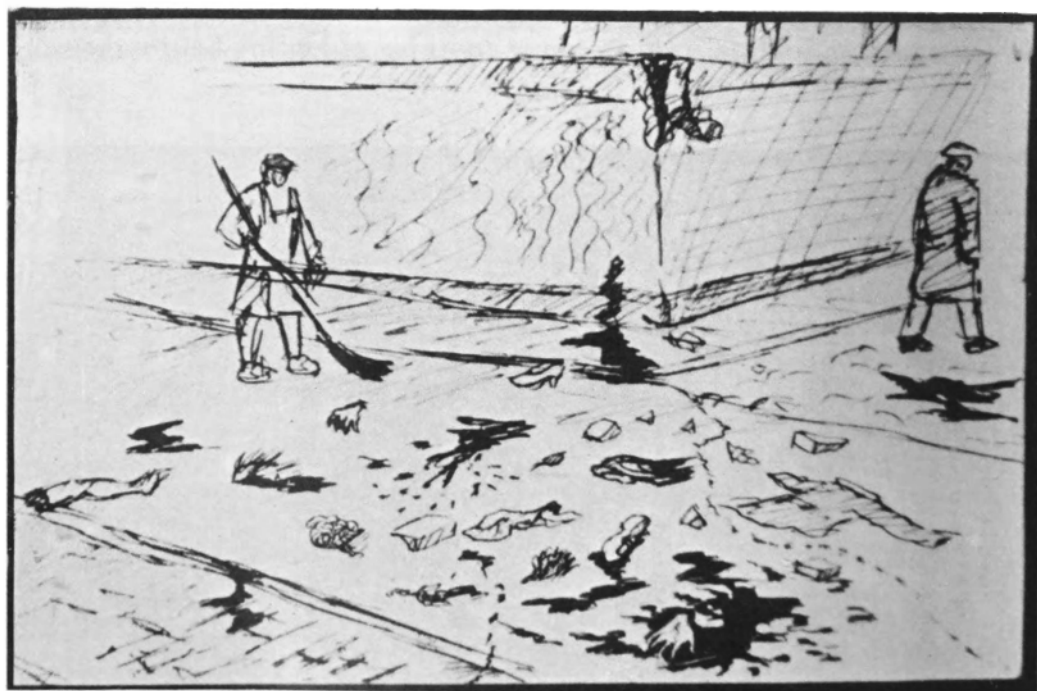
"I didn't see her any more. I was transferred to a different school and then when I went back to my old school she was no longer there."

"What was her name?"

"Yelena Ignatyevna."

"And you don't know her surname?"

"No."*



* After the publication of the book in the magazine *Novy Mir*, her pupils began ringing up to say: "It's Nikolayeva, Yelena Ignatyevna Nikolayeva!"

Children's memories or rather the memories of those who were children during the blockade are not like the recollections of adults, although they are adults themselves now—mothers, fathers, even grandparents.

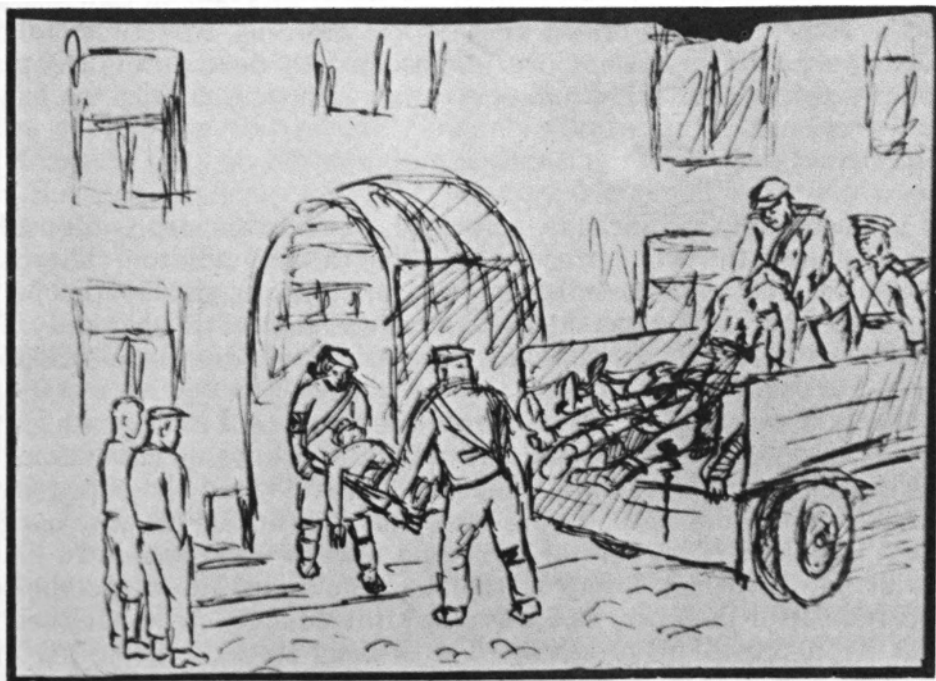
The child's memory has preserved a tremendous amount, it recorded everything clearly and exactly. Some pictures it retains cannot even be interpreted by the now adult mind. And some of the fears are also not very comprehensible to us.

Six-year-old Vitya's (*Victor Korbunov's*) clearest memory of a bomb attack is a big wardrobe dancing on its legs! And also that they had glass all over their beds in the kindergarten after air raids.

Volodya's (*Vladimir Den's*) mother let him out to play. He was twelve at the time—it was February 1942. After such a long time indoors the air outside made him slightly dizzy. Most of all, he was amazed by the enormous depth of the snow—it rose high above his head—snow trenches, snowdrifts, ground floors walled up by snow, snow mountains. And it was unlike city snow, it was clean, sparkling, dazzling. And thirty-five years later, again in February, he went to Kirovsk to go skiing.

"I was walking along the street there and—what was this? I had this strange feeling. That snow! The pavements weren't, of course, covered with snow quite as much as they had been the other time. But the lawns were all buried deep in snow—it came above my head. It was being cleared off the roads and pavements and thrown onto the lawns all winter."

That clean snow with its arctic whiteness awakened a childhood block-



ade memory. The memories are never really gone—they return again and again, suddenly revealing themselves in a character, in habits, in dreams. It happens differently with every person, and sometimes in such a way that he doesn't realise where they come from.

Six-year-old Kolya (*Nikolai Khludov*) associated snow with hunger: "After the first snow had fallen I was continually wanting something to eat." That is the connection for him.

The pictures imprinted on a child's mind are mostly very clear, down to the last detail.

"I was fascinated by the trolleybuses waiting out the winter on the square before the Finland Railway Station. There was a burnt-out house next to it. When they were trying to extinguish the fire, jets of water that hit the tops of the trolleybuses just froze into enormous ice columns reaching down into the snowdrifts. These columns would sparkle and I would see right through them in the spring sun, and everything around looked like a fairy-tale ice kingdom" (*Lydia Melnikova*).

Eight-year-old Janna (*Janna Umanskaya*) associates the blockade with fearful cold. Cold, cold everywhere, under the blankets, in her fur coat—it was still cold. And also an enormous basket padded with pieces of a quilt her mother used to carry the dinner in. And the 200 gramme pieces of bread that they would put into a suitcase and then hide the suitcase in the base of the settee to stop themselves from eating all the bread at once.

"Morning, evening—they didn't seem to exist. Nothing. It seemed as if it was dark the whole time. I learnt to tell the time in this dark. And I still remember, much to my own shame, only the hour when Mother was supposed to feed me. Sometimes I knew it was morning, sometimes I didn't because we hardly ever slept, we just seemed to doze during the night. There is a saying that bread makes a person sleepy. But since we had no bread we did not really sleep."

In the agony of the blockade, among all the disasters, deprivations, horrors and deaths the worst tragedy was that of the children. They were looked after first and foremost by city institutions and by the people themselves. Their suffering, their situation was painful to everybody. And even in the fading, starving minds of the adults children were still to be cherished as something sacred.

"The food was always collected from the depot on a sledge by a grown-up—a woman clerk. She would always take two boys of about fourteen with her. Then my turn came. The depot was beyond the Narva Gates. We walked there and back. Going there was easy but on the way back we had to pull the sledge. One of us would always walk behind to keep a look-out. Going over a bump in the road the sledge tilted and the soya sweets fell out of their box into the snow. Immediately we were closely encircled by a crowd of passersby. The woman started waving her arms

about, exclaiming, and from her shouts the people understood that the sweets were being taken to a children's home, and the two of us, two puny creatures, were a graphic illustration. The people crowded round us, their hands outstretched, their eyes gleaming, but no one bent down. We collected all the sweets into the box, gathered up packages, righted the sledge and continued on our way. The people stood there following us with their eyes for a long time afterwards" (*Alexander Lyubimov*).

Little old children, unsmiling, silent, lifeless, understanding everything and not understanding anything. The Germans, the war, the fascists were somewhere over there, outside the city, and even the blockade remained an abstract notion for six-, eight-, and ten-year-olds. What was real was the darkness, the hunger, the sirens, the explosions—but why was it all happening to people? Where had all the food gone, where had their families vanished? The war was not personified in enemies, in local informers, in foreign speech as happened, say, in occupied territories. We are talking about very small children—the older ones very quickly grew up. The little ones had their childhood cut short. It wasn't easy for those little old people to come alive again, to return to childhood, to find themselves.

Nina Kovalyova—a very warm-hearted, lively, thoughtful, reasonable woman talks about herself as a little girl in such a way that you feel you want to protect that little girl from her own merciless memory.

"How old were you?"

"Six. Mother wrapped me up in everything we had. I remember all sorts of rags and headscarves wrapped round me. And even two or three coats on top."

"Probably not only because it was cold but also so you could take the things away with you?"

"I don't know why she did it. I remember I could hardly move. I think all those rags and clothes took up ten times as much space as I myself. I remember we rode in a cart, and then we turned off somewhere. A man in a sheepskin coat stopped all the traffic. He said: 'Where do you think you're going? Germans!' And we turned off. I think Mother was somewhere next to me. She asked: 'Nina, are you hungry?' I was very hungry but I couldn't say it. Something was shouting inside: 'I'm hungry, Mother!' But I couldn't say it. And I was very frightened because my tongue just wouldn't move."

"But why couldn't you say anything?"

"I had the feeling that my tongue was all swollen up, it was like cotton wool. I couldn't move, I couldn't do anything. I was like a corpse. But the voice inside me was shouting—I'm hungry! .. Then I remember the time when we had already got to the Urals. I don't know where we went first. I remember I was sitting in the corner. And they were sharing out honey cakes. They weren't just broken in half, they were sliced crosswise so that you had the illusion of having a whole honey cake instead of a half... They gave us these honey cakes and kept asking: 'Is it nice?' I didn't even understand them. I remember sitting there and wondering: what's nice and what isn't nice? What does being hungry mean and what does not being hungry mean? I swear I was sitting with this thought in my head: what is it like not to be hungry?.. I remember something else

that happened in the Urals. When all the other children were asleep I ran off to the field. Everybody said that's where bread grew. I took it literally. I thought all I'd have to do was to dig a small hole and there I'd find a fresh loaf of bread. I'd take it and eat my fill. I sat digging and digging. I dug a deep hole but still no bread! I sat and cried. Then I remember a very tall man came up: 'What are you doing here?' I said I was digging for bread. And, you know, they were either very nice people or my imagination was working—the elderly man lifted me onto his shoulders and carried me somewhere. I remember a dark room. He gave me potatoes to eat and told me that first you must sow the seed, then grow it, harvest it, grind it into flour and then bake it. And then you have bread... And I remember we had a fat nanny. Sometimes she'd hug me against her belly and keep stroking my hair. But it didn't mean anything to me, my mind was so dulled. Even when I started school I still couldn't think clearly."

"And where was your mother?"

"I don't even know. After we'd been taken across Ladoga we were put into a lorry (or it might have been a cart) and I don't think she was with me then. My sister was ill. I remember her lying in a hospital ward. I think she had TB. She was given a spoonful of sugar and a piece of butter. She couldn't eat it. So I'd hide under the bed and she would feed me. She gave what she was supposed to have to me and I'd lick it off her spoon."

"She'd push the spoon under the bed?"

"Yes. I'd say: 'Valya, when will they give you some more?' "

"Did you stay there long? Was your ward near?"

"No, I wasn't a patient there. I don't know how it all happened. I re-



member she lay in bed and they gave her sugar and butter. She couldn't eat it so I'd be under the bed licking it all off. And later—I was so dull-witted! I remember—this was later when we were returning home—Valya and I were sitting in a train. I was so terrified of the train that they had to drag me into the carriage by force! The engine, the steam, the smoke all frightened me. Valya said: 'Look, Mother's coming to meet you.' She was older than me. If I was six she must have been nine. She was already of an age to reason things out. But me ... I'd even forgotten the word 'mother'. Next I remember Mother already on the platform and Valya saying: 'Mother's coming.' And I was pushing my mother away and saying: 'Where, where's my mother?' Valya said: 'But that's her! She is here!' And I wouldn't accept her for a very long time. I refused to accept her, was so resentful that when we started school and were given report books or notebooks I would deliberately write in very bad marks myself and leave them for her to find. And I'd watch her from my corner. What was it? I didn't have the feeling that I had a mother, that I had found her."

"Did she treat you well?"

"Of course she did. She'd lived through so much, seen her children in such a state that she thought she'd lost them. How could she mistreat us? She suffered a great deal, but her suffering somehow seemed to give me pleasure. I can't explain what it was. I can't even understand that spite now. And I regret it. I've completely changed since then. But I was just horrible at the time and I couldn't seem to understand anything. I remember my maths teacher trying to get me to understand a very simple numeri-



Children's drawings.

cal problem. She tried and tried to get it into my head, but I still couldn't understand it! I couldn't even learn to count up to twenty. I don't know what was the matter."

"Where's your mother now?"

"She's retired, so is my father. They both have bad health. Especially Mother. Father's a bit healthier, tougher."

"Does she often recall Leningrad and the blockade?"

"No, she doesn't. We don't ask her and she doesn't speak of it. I tried once: 'Maybe you could tell me something about it?' And she sort of shouted at me: 'No, I don't want to!' She never watches films about the war, she avoids going to see them. She can't stand the word 'war' now and doesn't want to listen to anything about it."

"Tell us about Victory Day, please."

"I remember this. At the end of the war we were given sweet curds made with soya flour. I remember Victory Day at Five Corners. The music was very loud, gramophones were blaring from the windows. It was already spring. There were crowds of people about. I remember two soldiers carrying a big fancy bun, a most enormous white one. I think it was a real one. People kept throwing flowers at them. Flowers and little scraps of paper floated down from the balconies. But I didn't have anything except this sweet curd. I went up to them and gave the soldier who was carrying the bun my sweet curd."

"Did he take it?"

"I don't remember whether he did or didn't. Anyway, this was my present—instead of flowers."



A picture made during the blockade.

Irina Kireyeva remembers a girl from the children's hospital. She was already dying when she was brought in. She was older than Irina.

"She said: 'Please eat my bread,' (how much was it? The ration was 125 grammes) 'I won't live till tomorrow.' She was lying next to me. The beds stood very close together so as to get as many in as possible.

I remember I couldn't sleep all night, I kept thinking—should I or shouldn't I take the bread? Everybody knew that she just couldn't eat any more. But if I take her bread, I reasoned, they'll think I stole it from her. And I was terribly hungry. I was struggling with myself—it wasn't mine! In the end I didn't take the bread. When they say now that a starving person will do anything—steal, etc.—I remember my feelings then, a little girl, when I just couldn't take something that wasn't mine although it was being given to me. And the girl did die and that piece of bread still remained under her pillow."

The implied polemics flare up in the most diverse stories. It boils down, roughly speaking, to the following two views: some, like *Irina Kireyeva*, consider a human being stronger than starvation, and that he has not the right under any circumstances to lose his human dignity, to break the laws of humanity, integrity and honour. They do not forgive, do not justify the actions of those who stole bread, took it from others, resorted to swindling and cheating. They went through it all themselves and never once faltered or yielded, and thus earned the right to that opinion. Others were also tortured by the pangs of hunger and saw how difficult it was for a starving person to be responsible for his actions.

It is one of those arguments that are not resolved by means of mathematical logic. They go on for many years, through many generations, reflecting the differences in the human heart, the varying degrees of will-power and fortitude, the different upbringings and maybe other qualities unknown to us.

Later on we came across another episode similar to the one of the children laughing for the first time in class. It is almost the same kind of story but not quite. We shall give you this second one as well. It would be difficult to choose between them.

It was late autumn 1942. Some schools had opened. The school *Irina Kireyeva* went to had only one class consisting of about seventeen children.

"We decided to skip a lesson. We suddenly wanted to get up to some mischief, but the doors were all locked to stop us from going out into the street. So we broke down the back door and ran off. But we bumped into the head of our local education committee who said: 'Go back to school immediately!' We weren't allowed into the street because of gun fire. Anyway, there was nothing for us to do in the street. So we went back to school to see the deputy headmaster and she suddenly started crying.

"I can understand now why all the teachers were glad, because it was our first childish prank and meant that the children were returning to life.

They clearly understood that and it made them very happy."

The two stories are both similar and different. The first is about laughter, the second about mischief: the teachers reacted differently but had the same understanding of the event. Each story has its own individuality, its own distinguishing characteristics. Here are different shades of meaning, different feelings and situations. Could we have chosen only one of them at the risk of impoverishing the general picture? Whenever we had to limit ourselves we saw no advantages, only losses and more losses.

When you listen to story after story, day after day, you develop a tormenting need to be reassured, again and again, that smiles were possible, childhood was possible, that all such things existed, were to be found, were possible!

"We were sitting there, and they were talking only about food: 'Mother's brought apples,' 'Mum's made some semolina pudding! ...' To sum it up, they were sitting there like old folk and talking only of food. Then suddenly a little girl in a white dress ran out from among these youngsters and started skipping. They all looked at her bewildered. I didn't even ask whose child she was, but it was very pleasant to see her take wing like a butterfly. You know, she even put heart into me, raised my spirits somehow" (*Nina Rogova*).

Right till December 1941, tugs and barges continued breaking through to Leningrad across Ladoga. By that time the Military Council of the Front had done everything possible to open the Road of Life. On November 21 strings of horse-drawn vehicles set off wending their way across the first ice, and after them came the lorries. Sixty vehicles moved to the eastern bank of the lake for flour. Leningrad started getting bread. But it took weeks and even months before the ration rose from 125 grammes to 150, 200 and later 300 grammes. Lorries from Kobona brought the bread, forcing their way through blizzards, avoiding patches of thin ice and cracks. The Road of Life could not immediately replace the dwindling stocks of food in the city. The whole country began sending Leningrad all it could: convoys of lorries laden with flour and gifts, and strings of partisans' sledges. And in the opposite direction, out of Leningrad, the lorries carried mothers and children, those who were the very worst off. Twenty thousand soldiers, officers and volunteers kept the Road of Life open. They did everything possible, even things that would have been impossible in normal life. The heroism of those people constitutes one of the finest pages in the history of the Great Patriotic War. They were heroes—each in his own way—by virtue of their separate unrepeatable feats.

"We were all terribly afraid of dying on the ice. Why? Because we were afraid the fish would eat us. We'd say we'd rather be killed on dry land, blown to little pieces, than die on the ice. Especially me. I was a coward. I won't hide it—a coward. Scared of a fish eating me! And from then on I've been afraid of water. When I was a girl I was even a good swimmer. I used to be in competitions... But then, after the ice road I began feeling

lightened of water. I can't even have a bath sitting down, I have to stand under the shower. Water just terrifies me."

This is what we were told by *Olga Melnikova-Pisarenko*, one of the first to be awarded the Order of the Military Red Banner on the Leningrad front, a soldier about whom Fadeyev and Simonov wrote articles in their time. When listening to this tiny woman you really believe that she was frightened just as you believe in her Order (she was the third Leningrad woman to receive it) and in her heroism on the Road of Life.

"The evacuation started in the second half of January. The first to go were the seriously wounded. The most terrifying part of the evacuation was when they took children and sick women. That was called the 'very precious cargo' because they were live people, emaciated and starving! These people looked so horrific and thin that they were wrapped in blankets and shawls—anything that happened to be at hand—just to get them across the ice road. Towards dawn, when the lorries were crossing Lake Ladoga, the drivers would race along madly to get across those thirty or thirty-two kilometres as fast as they could. Well, towards dawn we would find five or six small corpses. They were wizened little children. They were already dead, for you can imagine what happens when a child flies out of its mother's arms at top speed. We tried to find out whose children they were. We'd unwrap them but there'd be no note, nothing. These were babies from eight months to a year old, little girls and boys."

"The mothers couldn't keep hold of them?"

"Imagine a mother holding her child in her arms. Then, say, the lorry goes over a bump in the ice with a great jerk and the baby goes flying because its mother's too weak to hold it. The mothers were so weak—they were virtually in the last stage of dystrophy, perhaps had already reached it. People had carried them to those lorries and put them aboard in order to send them to the 'mainland'. And sometimes there would be whole columns of covered lorries and buses full of children going across. These children were of nursery school age and school age. And although these were covered lorries they didn't have any heating. They were very cold. Not like the heated buses and trolleybuses we have now. And quite often the lorries' radiators would just freeze up during a blizzard, the water would freeze practically instantaneously. The driver would have to spend an hour and a half, or even two, thawing the radiators on the exposed ice. And it was all right if they stopped near one of our tents. We'd get all the children into the tent, give them medical attention and feed them. If you could call it feeding them. We would give them bits of rusk, and we gave them sweetened tea too. And if we saw the child was in very bad condition we'd try and do everything possible to enable him to make it to the 'mainland'! Sometimes we'd have to inject them with camphor to keep their hearts going."

"I had a few Siberians from the Urals working in my tent in February. Big strong soldiers, they were my orderlies. They'd say: 'But Olga Nikolayevna, these children are as good as dead!' 'No,' I'd tell them, 'they're alive, their hearts are still beating—they're alive.' The reason their eyes were so lifeless was that they were starving. Quite often these children had hair growing on their faces."

"Like old men?"

"Yes. We called them the aged little people. When these children got to our tents they had no strength, no will, they didn't move (not like our children now). Sometimes you'd take them by the hand and feel no more than a thin layer of skin stretched over it. You could have counted every single bone underneath. And when the driver came back to say that the lorry was ready, that the children could all get back into it again, they would put up such a fight! They didn't want to leave the warm tent. We had looked after them for a while, given them a piece of rusk and sweet tea. They resisted. Well, we'd try and persuade them that they'd be taken to an even better place where they'd get soup and a fresh roll, where they'd be nursed and it would be even warmer. 'You'll like it there. We'll come all the way to Kobona with you,' I'd say. And occasionally we'd have to go all the way to calm the kiddies. They settled down when they saw we were coming with them. But their gaze was so lifeless, you know, their eyes so dull—they didn't look real, like glass eyes, you might say. They'd light up for a few minutes when we gave them the rusks, but then they'd dim again in an instant."

These were very small children who did not understand or realise anything. They were children who survived but could not tell you anything about it today. They do not remember. They were at an age when the memory is not fully functional. Even if vague pictures of their early childhood flash through their minds they cannot understand their significance.

Of all the stories we listened to and took down there are a number that stand out by virtue of their significance, and of the memory and authenticity of feeling carried on through the years. Above all there is *Maria Dmitrieva's* (54, Gaaz Prospekt) story, although to appreciate it to the full you have to see her telling it, or at least to hear her voice. But as you are reading her story and not listening to it something must be said about the narrator herself.

This now large and, of course, elderly woman (compared with a photograph taken during the war) is kindness itself. Active goodness incarnate. Retelling her heart-rending story required great spiritual effort. She seems to see and feel everything that happened thirty-five years ago over again, reliving it all as she speaks. And you are no longer simply listening, you seem to be hurrying along with her, with her civil defence fighters from barrack to barrack, from fire to fire, from death to death...

Maria Dmitrieva, chief of the civil defence under the housing office of the Kirov district, even today remembers every single one of the incidents and the numbers of the houses where it happened.

"It happened in December, I think. Or was it January? It was still winter with a hard frost. Shelling started. It was very heavy. It took us a long time to get through to Shvetsov Street. Two houses had been shelled—No. 47, and on the opposite side, nearer to us—No. 36. We ran there. At No. 36 it wasn't really noticeable. The shell had somehow gone through a window, right through the panes—the glass was shattered! —and had blown up in the flat. It had killed a girl. We only saw her on our way out. But she was dead. She was kneeling in the middle of the room wearing only a slip. She must have jumped up to run somewhere but didn't make it in time. It



Maria Dmitriyeva, 1942.

blew her head off. Only her hair was lying on the floor. She must have been about eighteen. Then we got through to number forty-seven. That was maybe one or two in the morning. I got there and started shouting but I couldn't hear anyone anywhere. A window was lit but there was no light on the stairs. Well, I had a little torch hanging from a button, and that wasn't working properly, just giving out a dim light. I went upstairs to the first floor. I shouted again—there didn't seem to be anyone there. Then I opened the first door I came to on that floor. I don't remember if I used the torch at first or whether there was some sort of light there already. I couldn't say definitely. As soon as I'd opened it I saw Katya Dyomina, a young woman, sitting on the sofa by the stove (there was a kind of round stove there). She was holding a baby, about three months old or less, in one arm and had another one, a little boy of about four, across her knees. I went closer and started talking to her—the light was so bad! Then I shone my torch at her and I saw half her head had been torn off by a shell splinter—that's how it was! She was dead. But this two- or three-months-old baby—I don't exactly know his age—was alive! How had he survived? But the one on her knees, the three- or four-year-old boy (a fairly large boy) was also dead. His back and legs were broken."

"The shell had exploded outside?"

"It had blown up outside the house and the fragments had flown in between the boarding and the window-frame. And she was sitting there—and that was it! Then I heard someone else come in. I opened the door and shouted: 'Come in here!' And some woman came in. She told me No. 40 had been hit by a shell as well (it was the house opposite). But the people got off lightly. Somebody was slightly wounded but there were no

casualties. And this Katya's husband was at the front... Well, and then we had to leave it until the morning. I rang the Air Raid Defence Organisation in the morning, then the Red Cross people came and took them all away."

"And what did you do with the baby?"

"The baby stayed here with us for a long time—there was a sort of child reception centre, a kind of nursery here in ... I can't remember the name of the street, between Baltyiskaya and Shvetsov streets. We took a lot of children there."

"They stayed there?"

"Yes. They'd stay there for a while and then they were evacuated. There were many children still in the city, so many. Sometimes they'd be left with a grandmother or with aunts. There were a lot of children. If I told you everything—it was like some awful nightmare. We found all sorts of people too. They weren't even people, more like shells of human beings."

Of course, the effect of a particular story depends on the story-teller's natural talent. But it also depends on its own truth. "If I told you everything..." Dmitrieva told us everything she could remember.

"There was a little boy in No. 36. His mother was a geologist and she had had to stay wherever it was she was working. So he was left with his grandmother. Such a handsome little boy. I can still picture him. I kept wanting to take him in. But I just couldn't because I was working so much all the time. I was hardly ever at home, rarely slept there."

"Pardon me for asking, but were you married?"

"Yes. My husband was at the front."

"Did you have any children?"

"Yes, they were evacuated with my mother. I was left on my own. But I love children so I felt very sorry for him. He was so intelligent, so handsome. What a fine person he could grow up to be, I thought. I didn't realise just how emaciated he was. His grandmother died. We didn't know where his mother was. He had no father. So when I was on duty he would come and sleep right there in the office."

"How old was he?"

"Eight or nine, but he already understood everything. One night he told me all about himself. The last night. I came back in the morning to find him lying there—dead. Just imagine it! The evening before I had broken off the crust of my bread ration and given it to him—he hadn't any ration cards. I was on duty that evening and we had talked. I thought he was very tired and wanted to sleep, because he was lying down instead of sitting. But he just didn't have any strength left. But he didn't moan, didn't complain about anything. I remember asking him: 'Alyosha, just how could it have happened?' He said: 'It was like this, Maria Ivanovna. I thought she was nice because she used to visit us when grandmother was alive—this woman. But when grandmother died she took me in and took our ration cards too.' 'She took your things too?' I asked. 'She took all we had. Then she told me she couldn't be bothered with me.' Anyway, she told him to go. I never thought anyone could be like that... So he came

over here, to this house. What could I do? We weren't able to do much at that time. They wouldn't have given us any ration cards in the middle of the month. We could only have done something for him at the start of the next month... Yes, and then there was another time when someone dumped a baby on me."

"Right outside your block?"

"No, not outside the block—right outside my front door! It happened like this. At night we also went out on missions, pin-pointing the location of enemy rocket-launchers. We had these commissions. And I'd been invited to participate. And so we'd go out at night. Then in the morning we were told: 'Go and rest. You needn't come to work until twelve.' So off I went. I went to my centre—I had to find out how things were. I had a boiler organised there for the helpless, for those who dropped in their tracks in the street. They were brought to us and given hot water. Maybe it wasn't very much help but it was still something. There were special women helping there."

Boiling water was an enormous help in those conditions. "Boil the water well, and it's like food," wrote poet Oleg Shestinsky.

"I was climbing the stairs to my flat. There was nobody about. It was in the daytime. I went indoors. There was a stove in the kitchen. I used a handful of twigs or something like that to make some tea. Then I suddenly heard someone or something crying outside on the stairs. But there weren't any children left in the flats on our staircase. What could it be? A child? I listened. Maybe a cat? No, the cats had all been eaten long ago. I went out. And there was a child sitting outside my door, wrapped in a piece of coarse black material like the stuff railwaymen's coats are made of. It had some sort of rag wrapped around its head. It was swathed from head to foot, even its eyes. And this bundle was crying. I went over to it, everything else forgotten. I picked it up and went back into the flat. The stove had been heated so it was still slightly warm. I put a chair next to it and unwrapped the bundle. It was a boy. He could hardly talk. 'Where's your mother?' I asked. 'Dead. NENYA, NENYA—he's run away.' His brother had probably left him there and run off himself. Maybe someone had put the idea into his head."

"So you found him right outside your door?"

"Yes, my very door... 'NENYA, NENYA—he's run away.' 'Where's your NENYA then?' But he didn't know anything, not even his address. He was a nice little boy, too. A big dark-eyed boy. What could I do? The first thing I did was to warm a bucketful of water and wash him. He was so dirty, so neglected—it was terrible. I bathed him, gave him some food and we ate together. I had to go to work, so I took him with me. When we got there I rang Ivan Kotelnikov—the head of the Criminal Investigation Department. He's worked in our district all his life. Well, I said: 'Ivan Vasilyevich, listen to this. What shall I do with him?' 'All right,' he said, 'you'd better bring him in.' 'Bring him in!' I exclaimed. 'But they won't take him just like that, I need some sort of permit. And do you think I've got one?' 'Yes, it's true they require one now, because sometimes people have brought their own children in,' he told me. 'Don't go anywhere right now. I'll send a soldier round with the permit.' We had a few women who used

to take children to the child reception centre. We didn't give them any other work, but they were just about capable of that. And one of these elderly women, Ustya—I don't remember her surname now (she died soon afterwards)—this Ustya went back with the soldier. Took that little boy round there. Here's another incident—No. 56 Shvetsov Street. I think the house was totally demolished later on. We hadn't seen anyone coming out of one of the flats for some time. It was on the ground floor too. And there were so few people left in the houses. I went—not by myself—I took two more people with me. You never know, hardly anyone lived there because the house was so damaged. There was this locked room. We tried and tried to force it open but then the caretaker brought a bunch of keys and we tried again. We opened the door and saw a bed. The mother was lying there dead. A young woman, her surname was Belova. Her husband was at the front. But the child—I think he was about a year and a half old—was alive. And he was crawling all over her and trying to suck at her breasts. It was horrifying. Well, what do you think! Such a scene before our eyes. Anyway, what could we do, we took this child."

Here we shall briefly interrupt Maria Dmitrieva's story...

Starvation and children, the blockade and children—these are the greatest crimes of the fascists against Leningrad and Leningraders. By tormenting children with hunger, and killing them, they tried to torture Leningraders with pity for their children. They waited for Leningrad's defenders to die or to surrender their city—to surrender the entire northern flank of the Eastern Front.

In *Ivan Kalyagin's* story of the operations of the Kirov district AA defence organisation, where he was in charge, there is a small incident which somehow seems to show all the horror and pain a mother can experience.

"I remember an occasion when I received a report that here, in Traktornaya Street, there was an unexploded shell in a flat. So I sent an explosives expert round. Off he went. He arrived there, then rang me up to say that he couldn't get the shell away. 'What do you mean you can't get it away?' 'I just can't. Come round and see for yourself.' I went there. Walked into the room. There was a woman lying on the floor cuddling the shell—she'd wrapped it in a shawl (it was still warm)—and she wouldn't let us have it. She wouldn't let go of it! We tried to find out what was the matter. It turned out that her young baby had been taken away. In a panic a relative had snatched up the baby and gone off as she saw the shell. But the mother had been left behind. She saw this shell and got it into her head that it was her baby. Well, she was already out of her mind..."

When they got to the "mainland" they could be recognised at once, those Leningrad children!

At the same time they could not be recognised.

People knew them by their old men's faces and their walk, but most of all by those eyes that had seen everything! They had seen everything that the Leningraders "had concealed from the 'mainland'" (*Olga Bergholtz*).

Yet friends or relatives often couldn't recognise these children when they met them. Like the soldier (this is in the notes of Lydia Okhapkina) who jumped into a lorry newly arrived in Cherepovets, looked at his wife and children and was about to get off—he didn't recognise them! But when they called "Daddy!" he looked again and ... "for some reason doffed his cap".

Only after she had left besieged Leningrad did *Galina Marchenko* realise what she must look like to a normal person:

"We found ourselves in some village in the Vologda region. And we discovered that my neighbours' relatives lived in a nearby village. Their daughter had once been to Leningrad and had been round to visit us, and when we arrived she ran in and asked me: 'Granny, where's Galya?' "

"This was you, at the age of thirteen? Was it because of the way you were dressed?"

"Yes, I was dressed that way and I was all skin and bone. 'Klanya,' I said, 'I'm Galya.' She started crying and said: 'I didn't recognise you!' "

Olga Troitskaya (39 Degtyarny Lane), a nursery school teacher, recollected the first impressions, the initial reactions of children when they emerged from the world of the blockade, which they were used to, into an ordinary, normal world.

The first impressions:

" 'Look, the grass is growing! ' (We used to cut it and eat it.)

Or:

" 'You know, our train attendant's boiling potatoes, and she's throwing the skins away! ' they told me with horror. When I told the attendant about it, she said: 'Well, I'll certainly treat you to some potatoes.' And we sat and waited for her to invite us, but she never did...

"There was a girl in my group (I've forgotten her name). She'd been brought in from some tiny little place outside the city. The Germans had burnt the settlement down before her eyes, and had murdered her mother and the other people living there. But she had hidden away somewhere and so had been saved. She sat there like a little mouse. She was only a child, and we wanted to bring her to life, somehow, but she didn't react in the least to anything. I asked all my relatives to look around at home for some toys to give her. At last I collected some motley scraps of things and brought them to her, and suddenly she stretched out her arms to them! Or there was a little boy. A barge had been sailing across Lake Ladoga. It was bombed and everyone else was drowned, but the boy was wearing his father's inflatable jacket, and that had saved him from drowning. He had been handed over to us at the children's home. The boy went about like a wolf cub. He wouldn't let anyone near him, and wouldn't allow anyone to take his jacket from him. Or there was *Lusya Volkova*. She had been found in some house or other, lying in a room with her mother's corpse. A little girl, about eight years old. And when we went away to the Yaroslavl region, she cried terribly at night. I said: 'Lusya, what's the matter?' 'My tooth aches.' Of course, none of her teeth were aching. But she put her arms round me, cuddled up and calmed down."

"I remember hearing this noise in the yard. I asked my mother and she said it was nothing to worry about, that they were only pulling boards from the fence. It turned out they were installing the anti-aircraft guns. This was right at the beginning of the war. My first childhood impression at the start of the war."

This was what *Janna Umanskaya*, who now sings in the Academic Choir, told us.

"I went out very very rarely. I saw this snow-shrouded city, the terrible disorder in the streets, the many corpses. My mother would try to distract my attention in some way. I saw a person's last agony—he was crawling because he couldn't get up—he kept clutching at the wall. It was terrible. But somehow it didn't impress my young mind with horror or despair because things appeared simpler then. Now when I think about it I realise just how much horror we had to live through. I remember the children's New Year party during the blockade. Perhaps that'll be of interest. I was a child then. It was a tragic day—January 11th—the day my father died."

"Where did he die?"

"At home. He had just been called up to the front. He was an officer of the reserve, one of the higher commanding officers. But before that he'd been digging trenches. It must have been very difficult with food there—he was all bloated when he came back. And when he went to the military enlistment office about the call-up he was told that he couldn't go—he wasn't well enough. And somehow all the men remaining in Leningrad were struck down, it seems to me, very quickly (this was the first winter, the first few months of 'forty-two). He would slip me all the miserable crumbs he got, on the quiet, so that my mother wouldn't know. I didn't understand enough to refuse it—he was robbing himself. He couldn't get up, he just lay there and tried to give me extra food, to save my life, I understand it all now! "

"You don't remember what he talked to you about?"

"That I don't recall. He didn't talk an awful lot. 'Look after your mum,' he'd say. 'Listen to her, and don't you get upset if anything happens,' he'd sometimes say to me. But I didn't realise what inevitably had to happen. On January 11, someone gave me a ticket to this New Year party. I don't remember how I came to have it. I think I must have been in my first year at school. I went on my own. We were told that we must make these little bags. They had to be carried under your coat, so that nobody could see the New Year gift you'd got at the party, because there were all sorts of people about, some of them crazed with hunger. Not everyone could keep themselves under control, not everybody still had a sense of decency and humanity. All manner of things happened. Now I most clearly remember us, starved little children, and the conjurer at the party who was in the same sad state as ourselves—his jacket hung on him and he had a scarf wrapped round his neck. He tried showing us a few tricks, but all the children sat there totally uninterested. The moment finally came when they couldn't bear it any longer and asked: 'Are we going to get dinner soon?' How little of the child was left in any of us! Well, they gave us some kind of dinner. At the time it seemed magnificent by our wartime standards. And we got New Year gifts, too. I don't recall quite what we got, there was an apple, a

biscuit and a sweet, I think. I shoved them into my little bag and put it under my coat. But if anyone had looked closely they would have seen from my face that I was carefully guarding something—my hands clutched the present tightly and I had a frightened look on my face.

"I got it home safely. After we'd made the tea with great difficulty, heating it over a candle, Mother said: 'Go and wake Daddy up, he seems to be sleeping very soundly. We'll celebrate, it can be our New Year party.' (We had nothing to celebrate the New Year with at the appropriate time.) I thought my father was stretched out rather strangely, half uncovered. He always used to ask me: 'Janna! Tuck my blanket under—there's a draught coming from over there, and from over there.' I went in, calling, 'Daddy! Daddy! Daddy! Dad!' But he didn't move. I shouted out, and called my mother. 'Calm down, calm down,' she said, 'he's sleeping.' And she led me out. For some strange reason he was in the other room this day. Perhaps he felt he was dying and had asked to be moved there. It didn't enter my head, I just didn't understand, and I never even asked why he was in that room and not the other. I simply decided that probably the women had to be in one room and the men in the other. To put it briefly, he had died. One of our neighbours had also died. Together we managed to get both the men into the kitchen and we wrapped them up in blankets. They stayed in the kitchen about a month because we hadn't enough strength to take them outside. And I'm still amazed that we didn't feel any horror at the sight of the corpses. We felt no horror at all. And if we heard any noise in the flat we'd crawl to the kitchen to make sure they hadn't woken up. Most Leningraders were firmly convinced that many people sank into lethargic sleep, as can happen with people who are starved—and suppose they'd just fallen asleep! They might have woken up! We refused to believe that they were dead. But miracles don't happen, it seems. I often went to look. Mother began to let me go and see because I didn't accept the fact he was dead, I didn't understand that he'd died. I thought he'd gone to sleep and that he'd wake up."

"Did you know about lethargy?"

"Yes. Mother had explained it to me."

"But she didn't believe it herself?"

"No. She knew it was the end."

We keep thinking about that New Year party, the emaciated children and the equally emaciated conjurer. He goes through his tricks, and the children aren't the least bit interested. They're all dreaming of dinner. The conjurer and the children. Nothing on this earth could have diverted their thoughts, nothing could have distracted them from their desire to eat.

Many who were schoolchildren then remember the New Year parties of 1942. *Leonid Popov* attended a school New Year party that was typical of the time. Today he's an engineer, and we must say that he was extremely helpful to us in the collection of material.

"We were sitting in our classroom. The windows here and in the corridor were all blacked out. We had all been taken to our own classrooms—when we arrived we'd had a concert. I don't remember it. I recall there

were no lights on the New Year tree and it was twilight.

"Not long ago my daughter and I went to a New Year party at that same school. I stood by the window and started remembering... I remembered us sitting there, but I couldn't recall anything about the concert—we didn't pay any attention to it. We sat there in our coats, and afterwards went to the canteen. I was then in the sixth form of the school, which is now in Metal Workers' Avenue, behind the Gigant Works. They sent us invitations for January 5th.

"Before the war I finished the fifth form, but in winter 1941-42 I didn't go to school at all. I used to sit by the stove at the headquarters of some enterprise where my mother was the chief. Somebody (I've no idea who) tracked down me and my friend Arvid Kalniņš, and we went to the party together. Our mothers sat at home worrying. We went there in the morning, and at about three o'clock had a meal, they gave us dinner. There was an air raid warning, we went down below, and stood for a long time on the basement stairs. Then it began to get dark, and it seemed that things were quieting down. Although the all-clear hadn't gone, we went upstairs to the canteen. The teachers carried wick lamps. One of them, Sharova—she lives in the Yaroslavl region now—was the first teacher we'd ever had. The teachers walked between the tables to see whether we'd all been given everything. We sat there quietly, like mice. Before that we'd seen the New Year tree in the assembly hall. It was a big one, and had been decorated by the teachers.

"We took our coats off in the canteen. They gave us soup made from cabbage, a little rissole, with some cabbage, and then jelly made with essence. We had our dinner, ate it all up quickly. Then we went to the various classrooms, each form to its own room. There, in the dark, they began to give out eighteen chocolate-coated raisins apiece (it was calculated so that it would go round). We all checked that there really were eighteen raisins! We hid them and decided not to eat one little bit here—but to consume them at home. It was already six in the evening by then. Our mothers were getting very alarmed. Our gifts might be taken away from us on the way home—we could be beaten up. We left the school in twos and threes and more or less felt our way home. Our mothers were very glad when we turned up—and with our presents, too."

He doesn't remember what the concert was like, or the party, but he has very distinct recollections of the chocolate raisins. It is all very clear. One cannot help noticing that all the children recall quite definitely that they paid no attention to the conjurer, to the concert, the party. They remember this lack of interest, their own unchildlike reactions. It is as though they are reacting in retrospect to this New Year party which was organised with such difficulty, and the conjurer, and everything else they did not respond to at the time, as if it did not happen at all, and yet it did happen to them.

Maria Shchelyvanova lives all alone today, and maybe this is why she so vividly recalls her foster son Valeri. He left his alcoholic mother even before the war started, and then ran away from his loving foster mother, Ma-

ria Shchelyvanova, later on, too; then once more he ran off—this time for good—to the Leningrad Front.

This boy, striking-looking even in a childhood photograph, a Leningrad Tom Sawyer, comes over so very lively and vital in her stories of him. He is not content to know that "nobody and nothing is forgotten", he refuses to dissolve into the anonymous millions. He wants us to remember *him*. He wants to live on in our hearts and memories.

"Konanovich was in charge of management and supplies—not a very well educated man. One day in July he sent for me. It was the time the ration system was announced. I helped him give out the cards. When I got home I could already see Valeri from the courtyard. He was looking out of the window and he said: 'Auntie Musya! Hullo! I've come back.' "

"Your adopted son! He'd returned?"

"Yes, we'd adopted him before the war, and everything was all right. But he suddenly disappeared just before the war. My husband and I were so worried about him. But the war started and Valeri turned up. His mother was an alcoholic. They lived near Nevsky Prospekt. Why did he become a petty thief? There were petty thieves there and he fell under their influence. They took him because he was very quick. I'll show you a photo. He was a very cheerful, lively kid. They used to say at school that he'd either grow up to be a scoundrel or would become a distinguished figure. Anyway, he really cheered me up with his 'Auntie Musya! I've come back.' 'All right,' I said. 'But what am I going to do with you?' This was what he wanted: 'Auntie Musya, please get me into the factory trade school—the one near St. Andrew's Cathedral. That's the one I want to go to!' He was expelled from school because he was so mischievous—always playing tricks. So we got two teachers to give him private lessons. One of the teachers gave him lessons in most subjects—she was quite old, probably around seventy. The other one was a student, and she gave him maths lessons. He had lessons with them before the war up to the time he ran away. The two of them were really enthusiastic about him—he was so clever that he finished a year's timetable in four months! And now he comes home and says he wants to go to the factory trade school! He was only twelve, too. I went to see the school head, Anashkin. 'We can't accept him,' he told me. 'He's too young, and he needs a certificate from his school as well.' But he wasn't going to school then. So I went to Maria Konstantinovna and told her I needed to get Valeri accepted at the factory trade school and needed a certificate saying that he had completed the curriculum. She gave me the certificate, and had it witnessed. And, you know, I went to the trade school a number of times, but they just refused to take him. I nearly cried and said, 'He's not my own boy. My husband's gone as a volunteer to the front. How are we going to live now? I beg you to accept him.' And after one of my many visits to the school I came home (Valeri was waiting for me) and said: 'Well, you can say "thank you", Valeri, you've been accepted at the school.' He had an effusive nature and do you know how he expressed his thanks? He flung himself on the floor and kissed my foot! I still can't forget how overjoyed he was.

"So Valeri lived with me. He was given an overcoat that came down almost to his feet. He was only twelve and so he wasn't very tall, and the boys at the trade school were quite big. Once the instructor sent me a note saying he wanted to speak to me. So I went to see him. 'Your son's got a clever pair of hands,' he said. 'It never ceases to amaze me how well he can do everything. But, you know,' (and he opened a desk drawer which was full of money), 'we found all this money on the boys. Your son had some too. Do you give him money?' 'What money? I haven't any to give him!' 'Here you are—we took sixty roubles off him.' It turned out that many mothers who were evacuating their children often forgot their handbags and even their ration cards in shops, and the boys from the trade school would gather them all up. Once Valeri had said to me: 'Auntie Musya, I've got connections. Would you like to have some grain or fish?' 'How could you possibly have connections like that?' I asked him. But he shrugged his shoulders and said: 'I've got these connections and I can get you anything!' The little horror—saying things like 'I can do anything!' to me. 'How can you?' I demanded. 'Everything's rationed now.' I refused his offer. Another time he came to me and said (he could twist me round his little finger): 'Aunt Musya! I went into a shop and found a friend of my mother's, Aunt Nyusha, working there. "Valeri, how do you come to be in this district?" she asked me. "I'm living with Aunt Musya." "How are you getting on? Maybe you could come here for milk? Bring a milk bottle and I'll pour you some out." ' Unsuspectingly I gave him a milk bottle. He came back with this milk and drank nearly all of it himself. And then—he'd already made himself some red shoulder tabs (he was only a young boy), put a strap round his waist and made himself a wooden sword—he was playing at war with other boys! Once I said: 'Valeri, come on home. I've got to wash your trousers. You change, and then I can wash them.' When I took them I found ration cards in the pockets. He got the milk on the ration cards, that was it! Using children's ration cards! 'Valeri,' I said. 'I found some children's ration cards in the pockets. How could you get the milk on them? Have you a conscience or not? How could you deceive me like that? How can I live with you after this?' He shuddered and said: 'Ah well, Aunt Musya, I just can't get anywhere with you.' I told him: 'Just don't ever do it again! You know how little children need milk, and you've got their cards!' 'I found them.' 'It makes no difference. They're ration cards for little children.'

"Then the winter came—Valeri had a sixteen-year-old friend who lived on the floor below us. 'Valeri,' I said, 'it would be very nice if the two of you went across to the right bank of the Neva. I've heard there's still some potatoes in the fields, and cabbages, too. You could get some cabbage and we could make something with it.' He replied: 'Why not, Aunt Musya, of course I shall go. I'll arrange a day with Kolya.' On Sunday morning they set off, with a sack I'd given them. You know, I was so worried because the shelling started. I kept thinking—what have I done! I've sent the boy to get cabbage and the shelling's started there. I kept cursing myself. I just didn't know what to do. Five o'clock came, then six, seven, but no Valeri. Well, I thought, it's all your own fault. But then, at nine

o'clock he appeared, looking just like Father Frost with his sack. He was bent double, walking like a holy pilgrim. 'You're alive, Valeri!' I exclaimed. 'Yes,' he said, 'but it was difficult. We got across on a launch. I didn't need the five roubles.' (I'd given him the money just in case.) 'Aunt Musya, you can have them back.' I took the money. He had brought me five cabbages, which I later salted. He would sometimes say such things as he did once when we were going to bed: 'Aunt Musya, we had a collection for the Red Army today. I had to give twenty-five roubles.' I wondered with horror where he could have got twenty-five roubles, because I hadn't given him any money—it meant he had stolen them. It meant that he was still a thief. I didn't say anything. I felt I couldn't say that he'd stolen it and then given it to the Red Army.

"There was once a restaurant called The Golden Anchor here, on this embankment (we used to live near Bolshoi Prospekt), but at the time it was the canteen of the trade school. 'Aunt Musya,' he once said, 'we're going to get 25 grammes of chocolate each tomorrow—a big piece. But, you know, I don't like this chocolate. I can give it to you. But you're going to get soya sweets, and I like soya sweets very much. Let's swap.' He was dying to do something for me. But another time he truly amazed me. He came home once (he used to be so hungry! Although they used to get four hundred grammes of bread it was never enough for him—he was so small and hungry, and he was always running about everywhere, even before the war—god knows where he went); anyway, he came in to me and said: 'I'm going to show you something.' He put his hand into his coat and pulled out a small package. 'Aunt Musya, you'll never believe what a treat I've got for you! We were given a piece of pie made from white flour for supper. I've brought it home for you, Aunt Musya. I haven't touched it.' Can you imagine what a heart that boy had, that little thief? 'Let's break it in half,' I said. 'No, no, Aunt Musya, I brought it specially for you.' It came right from the bottom of his heart! The hungry boy had walked two tram stops with this piece of pie. What a person he could have been had he lived! This incident really shook me... Then he suddenly disappeared, I waited and waited, but he never came home. I went to the trade school and asked them: 'Could you please tell me where Valeri is? Have you sent him anywhere?' 'You know,' they said, 'your Valeri has run off with the older boys—the seventeen-eighteen-year-olds—they've run away to the front.' That's how he ran away again, and I never saw anything more of Valeri."

"That was the beginning of nineteen forty-two?"

"Yes, the winter of forty-two. I never saw him again. I made inquiries after the war but with no results. He ran away to the front and disappeared. Perhaps he was caught in the shelling, many of them got on trains that were shelled or bombed, and everything went up in flames. So Valeri vanished. Tears come to my eyes as I think of him."

In notes made at the front by artilleryman *Sergei Milyaev* there are many pages devoted to the haunting thoughts of the children who were there in Leningrad—so near—and so near, too for the nazis' shells!

At the very end of 1941, he wrote:

"31.12.41—1.1.42. I am starting a new notebook on the last day of

1941 and I shall finish the entry on the first day of 1942. So, we sum up the results: 1) 6 months and 10 days of war, or more accurately—190 days. I've been 180 days in the army, 40 days in the frontline. An artilleryman. I've taken part in a small-scale operation as rifleman in an infantry platoon. I've almost got the feel of being a commander. 2) In the 40 days I've been away from my family I haven't had a scrap of news from the kids. (I secretly hope they're alive, so I'm drawing no conclusions so far...) 3) At the front the situation has improved for us: the offensive launched in December is continuing, albeit slowly. Moscow is secure, Rostov too. Landing operations have begun in the Crimea (Kerch and Feodosia have been taken). But Leningrad's still in the ring of the blockade, and that means things are still very hard for my heroes, my little heroes..."

"21.1.42. What great joy! I've got a letter from the children at last, dated January 4. So there's hope they're still alive. The letter's restrained, but in essence despairing, the way it's written by my 13-year-old daughter. Little heroes! There's nothing about their mother or from her, so she must either be ill or angry, thinking I could help them..."

" 'Greetings, dear Daddy!

" 'We've received all your letters. Excuse us for not answering them. It's cold in the room, our hands become frozen. They've put a stove in for us, but we heat it when there's something to cook on it. There's no firewood. I can't write a long letter, but I'd like to tell you about everything. I don't go to school. Shurik's got very thin, and cries all the time. Valichka, too. I think it'll soon get better. We buy the bread (1 kilogram) and eat it right away, for there's nothing else to eat. On rare occasions we cook something. We go to the bus stop for water. In the night the water freezes. I don't read anything, and I don't feel I want to. Write more often. When we get a letter from you, it somehow makes us feel warmer. Daddy, Vasily (the brother of Auntie Nyusha, in the flat) died on 24th December. And Vova's father (you remember the little boy who used to come to see Shurik) also died. There's nothing else to write about. I don't want to write about bad things, and there's little good to write of. Greetings from Shurik, Inna and Valichka. Goodbye, Lyuda. 4.1.42. Please write more often.' "

"23.1.42. Zhilin brought three letters at once from the children and Maria... Maria writes: 18 people living on our staircase have died. Zhilin says that Shurik and Valya look the worst, the rest of my family, he thinks, will hold out. He particularly liked Maria—with her energy and her determination to keep going. That's the way Maria writes, too: 'We're clinging on to life.' Yes, hunger's turned out to be far more terrible than bombs or shells. Now, hopefully, things will take a turn for the better. They've even increased our bread ration by 100 grammes. It would have been better to increase the bread for Leningraders rather than us—the army can still endure it."

To appreciate the price of those last words one must read an entry made earlier, before those 100 grammes were added:

"17.1.42. I'm trying to walk less... It's two days since I started feeling general lassitude. It's very vexing to slip away from life because of hunger, rather than bullets..."

People who were seeking, inventing food and vitamins from goodness knows what substitutes; starving doctors who involuntarily staged "experiments" on themselves in connection with dystrophy (which had been virtually forgotten) and were treating Leningraders for it; people who were organising the provision of firewood, warmth, who were preserving cultural and scientific treasures, children's lives and so on and so forth—in Leningrad's heroic resistance all that was not so obvious as the salvoes of Kronstadt. But it was no less important for the outcome of the fight for the northern flank of an infinite front. The poet Sergei Narovchatov, who fought near Leningrad, once remarked that soldiers could hold the Leningrad Front, hungry and frozen as they were, because they knew there were living souls in Leningrad. It would have been impossible to defend just forest and bog.

The efforts of the unknown mother who saved the lives of children in the city, were continued in the attack of tank troops and infantry, in the artillery duel with the fascist child murderers.

In the blockade museum of Leningrad teacher training school No. 5, one of the teachers, Lyubov Beregovaya, showed us the original of a letter from Leningrad to the front—to the father of 13-year-old Tanya Bogdanova. How that Leningrad girl wanted, needed to complain to her soldier father, how she was afraid of wounding with her pain, her imminent death, one who was saving Leningrad! And she was just 13 years old, Tanya Bogdanova!

"Dear Daddy! I'm writing to you during my illness, when I think I shall die soon and write because I am awaiting death and because it comes most unexpectedly and very quietly. I ask you not to blame anyone for my death. (We have not changed anything in the text of the letter.—A.A., D.G.) I admit that according to my conscience I myself am to blame, since I haven't always obeyed Mother. Dear Daddy, I know that it will be hard for you to hear of my death, and I most terribly don't want to die, but there's nothing to be done if that's fate. I know that it will be difficult for you to understand my illness, so I write about it below. Mummy has tried very hard to keep me going, and has supported me in every way she could and can. She even took bits off her bread and a little off each of the others for me, but as it was very difficult to keep it up it turns out that I have to die. Daddy, I fell ill in April, when it was so nice outside, and I cried because I wanted to go out, but I couldn't get up from my bed. But thanks to dear Mummy—she dressed me and carried me in her arms into the courtyard—I could be out in the sunshine. Daddy dear, don't be terribly upset, after all, I most terribly didn't want to die because it'll soon be summer and in the future life will flower. I'm writing this letter to you, and crying myself, but I'm very much afraid of getting upset as then my arms and legs start going into convulsions. But how can I help crying when I so desperately like to live... I'm trying so hard not to just pass away, I haven't any desire for that, I lie and every day I wait for you, and when I start dropping off to sleep you begin to appear to me. I'm already trying not to think of anything, but the thoughts won't leave my head. Well, dear Daddy, don't get very upset and take my words about death calmly. I just want

to thank Mummy and my sisters and my brother for all their care and attention, and specially Mummy, to whom I can't find words to express my gratitude. After all, she has helped me in every way she could."

Soldier Bogdanov returned from the war. Five children died in his family, among them Tanya.

Sergei Milyaev had seen his children before he was killed. They are alive today, those children. But then they were close to death.

"19.2.42. From 11 a.m. on the 13th to 5 a.m. on the 16th I was home with my family. The city of death greeted me and took leave of me with corpses, darkness, dirt, and silence, sinister silence. I was met with tears and the corpse of Valichka. I took her to a common grave... Shurik is swollen. Maria, Inna, Lyuda, I think, will survive... In 4 or 5 days I'll describe everything, but now I'm in a state of such severe depression that I haven't the strength to write. In addition I'm physically so tired, I still haven't recovered after two days—I walked 60 kilometres in 11 hours.

"20.2.42. The same physical weakness as before, mental dullness, it's a blessing I'm busy all the time with my duties, otherwise... We'll wait...

"22.2.42. So, I'm starting on 'A Story for Myself', about Leningrad in February 1942. In the pre-dawn haze the silhouettes of the principal buildings of that beauty, my home city—stand out distinctly. And at 9 a.m. I was already in the streets of a suburb (2nd Murinsky).

"My first meeting was with a coffin, a sledge with a corpse and no coffin. Outwardly the city looks exactly as I visualised it from the descriptions of others: dirt, snowdrifts, snow, cold, darkness, starvation, death.

"But as I walked to Liteiny Bridge along Volodarsky Prospekt, having turned towards Moskovsky Prospekt along 25th October Prospekt, going all the way to Nevsky Gates and further on, everywhere I encountered frowning, emaciated but firmly courageous faces.

"At 11 a.m. I was at the door of my room, and I knocked, with alarm in my heart, and said: 'Open up, kids!' There were joyful exclamations of 'Daddy!' and howls and tears. Maria: 'Valichka has died.'

"The most terrible time was December 1941 and January 1942. February was already a month of hope of the very best thing there could be—the rapid lifting of the blockade (true, February has passed, there are five days left, and the ring of the blockade has not yet been completely broken, and our attempt to encircle the Germans will not give us railway access to the city and things won't be so good when spring starts on the Ladoga).

"500 grammes of bread for workers, 400 for office employees, 300 for dependants and children, supplemented by a little meat, cereal, dried vegetables... I brought a kilogram of good meat, a little fish, cereal and bread. They cooked it avidly and ate it for three days. As for myself, I relaxed in bed, gave my legs a rest in preparation for the 60 kilometre walk back, and went out only for water and I sawed a little wood for the stove. The flue was not much good, and the place was smoky, cold and unpleasant.

"The radio was working every day until evening on the 16th (I left home at 5.00 on 16.2.42 to set off in the direction of the Finland Railway Station).

"My first words when I got home had been: 'Alive! My loved ones!'

Дорогой папочка! пишу я вам это письмо во
время моей болезни и когда думала, что я умру
и пишу не из-за того что я жду смерти, а
потому-то она приходит сама неожиданно
такое. В моей смерти произошёл ничего необычного.
Сознаться по совести виновата я сама, так-как
никогда слушалась маму. Дорогой папочка я
знаю, что вам тяжело будет слышать о моей
смерти да и мне-то написать было не хоте
лось но никто не подумал раз судьба такая

Tanya Bogdanova's letter to her father.

And the knowledge that on the whole the adults in my family, my wife, were living was a calming, heartening feeling that remained with me all the time.

"At my request Lyuda went to the book and stationery shop. There were no books—that department was closed. She bought paper, notebooks and pencils, and said that 99 per cent of the shops were closed. Incidentally, a bit about trade. They're trading in the markets. For bread and tobacco (the latter costs more than bread) you can buy anything, literally anything. Robbers and speculators... I'm furious when I think there are people just like N., bastards who have fixed themselves up nicely in the city and are not, of course, suffering from hunger...

"The first day of my stay in the city, the 13th, went by in a flash. We ate fish soup, drank tea, heated up the stove, filling the room with smoke, and then lay down to sleep, and all night we talked, and didn't get to sleep. There unfolded before me a picture of the Schemilovka district's life in those days that were so dreadful for Leningrad: horror in the face of death; a titanic fight for life... There is much that's revolting. But that's life: a mother of four children takes the baby from her breast in order not to die herself. The baby will die. But then three others will live, who otherwise, without their mother, would die. Was the mother's decision justified? No doubt about it, it was. When Maria bought a stolen bread ration card, she did right, yes, she saved the lives of three children.

"Shurik has become 'the old 'un', 'the gnome', and has been given a thousand other descriptions and nicknames in the family because of his gloomy air, for constantly sitting by the stove and being unwilling to even walk across the room, for the fact that his sole topic of conversation is

food, going as far as to demand that they 'put out my bread separately', and because of the soya and water he consumed in secret, which resulted in his being bloated three times.

"Now he's in his overcoat, swollen and pale, just skin and bone, and only two black beadlike eyes to remind us of the old rosy Shurik.

"Lyuda's mood: 'I don't read anything, and I won't for another two or three months. I can't.' Maria's and the girls' bodies are dirty from hunger, smoke, and the fact that they haven't had a bath for three months already.

"In Leningraders' rooms there are chamber pots and pails ... to be emptied later through hatches into the sewage system. Day and night, for the toilets are not working. Judging by the newspaper *Lenpravda*, there are many, already many houses where the sewage system is operating, the water pipes are unfrozen and the heating system's working. Maybe all that will happen in Schemilovka soon? There's no light, but they got hold of some petrol, and it's burning well. I've got used to a wick lamp here, after all. They're not expecting the electricity to be turned on in the near future. And although they're cleaning the tramlines, people are saying that they'll 'only run two or three cabs with 4-5 carriages attached—to take the workmen to work'.

"It really is most agonising for starving or semi-starving, at any rate for altogether emaciated people to traipse across, let's say, from the Neva Gates to the Petrogradskaya Storona.

"The second day of my visit began well. Towards morning, in a soft bed, beneath a warm quilt, almost undressed, I dropped off and had a good sleep. In the morning there was tea with sugar. For dinner we had meat with cereal, and then porridge for seconds. 'Like peacetime,' my little jackdaws said happily, eating 2 or 3 portions of soup apiece and a full plate of porridge. We were celebrating the birthdays of Lyuda and Shurik (on February 18 Lyuda's 14 and Shurik 6)... Lyuda went out for some shopping, and got a packet of Nord cigarettes for 50 roubles, so I lay back in bliss.

"And today they promise to let us have 12 grammes of tobacco (twelve—don't misunderstand!) in honour of the holiday, and, after living without a smoke since the 18th—that is, for four long days, I'm waiting for those crumbs like manna from heaven.

"Lyuda walked as far as Sadovaya. She brought back almost everything I'd asked for. She was very tired.

"The day, the third I was home, was spent in attempts to get the stove going, to get warm. Then, at the neighbour's, I warmed my legs by a good hot stove and rubbed them with liquid ammonia. I slept until 4 a.m. The second and third nights I slept deeply and for a long time.

"Then I began getting my things together. Kissing everyone. I went out into the dark, soft night (the snow wasn't even crisp, but smoothly soft). It took two hours to walk to the political education centre at the Finland Station, and then I continued further.

"At 8.00 I was walking through the city outskirts full of impressions of cheerfulness and tormenting despondency, of freshness and filth, of the heroic breath of a great city..."

Sergei Milyaev was killed in 1944, in the battles for Vitebsk.

Those who didn't experience the blockade, *Ksenia Polzikova-Rubets*, a teacher, writes in her diary, "will never understand" that here death was "just as inevitable as at the front".

Here is her entry for March 2, 1942:

"I'm sitting in the deputy head's office. A nice little girl comes in—the daughter of Bubin, whom I buried in October. 'Good morning,' she says, 'everyone at home's dead now!' 'Who do you mean by everyone?' I and the deputy head asked simultaneously, looking at this pretty, absolutely untroubled little face.

" 'First it was Grandma, and then Mummy and Volodya on the same day, and then my auntie took me to her home, and our flat, while I was away with her, was robbed, and now I've come for the things we had in the bomb shelter, they were in a red bundle.'

In such a way a child's psyche tries to defend itself, it doesn't take in events...

"On the way Valya Peterson related the story of the winter with epic calm," *Ksenia Polzikova-Rubets* noted in her diary on August 3. "She told of how her father had died of hunger, how much 'Daddy loved the forest, and going hunting', and of how she'd found it hard to feed the setter and how they had eaten the dog."

And again: "On the way he (a boy called Kolobov) spoke with epic calm of how his mother had been killed by a high-explosive bomb while she was on watch. A beam had crushed her chest. He and his stepfather had rushed into the kitchen. Had they stayed in the room that would have been the end of them. A woman sitting in our compartment on the train spoke of her 19-year-old son's temples having turned white at the front. 'No doubt he'd speak quite calmly about my death. He used to be so considerate, so affectionate, and now I can't even get advice from him. Shall I go into evacuation, I asked him, and he said: Please yourself...' "

Adults were appalled and frightened by the children's calmness, their apathy to the deaths of those near and dear, to losses of life. What was it? Was it a child's inability to cope with extreme grief, with the universal disaster that had struck him? Or was it the defence mechanism of a not fully-fledged mind?

We don't know how to explain it, but we have seen something else, no less astonishing. When we met those former blockade children after 35 years, we discovered how fresh were their memories of those very same events, and that they were not trying to avoid bitter recollections as did many older people. On the contrary, they tended to read everything they could about the blockade, joined in the search for material, and gathered together their old schoolmates of blockade times... Deep down inside them that icy, starving time so devoid of childish pleasures exerts some kind of pull over them. The main thing then—the losses which seemed not to touch them, from which they somehow appeared to be alienated, all the sufferings they saw, it turns out, entered into their hearts forever, were imprinted on the childish, still impressionable nature. They continue to re-live those experiences a hundred times over. As a result of their experiences many of them have become warmer-hearted people, more responsive to the sufferings of others, to the misfortunes of strangers...

THERE ARE TWO MORE YEARS AHEAD

Left behind were the hardest months of the blockade—the winter of 1941 and spring of 1942. It was they that took the heaviest toll, many people still dying some time later, in evacuation.

Leningrad emerged from the winter, from cold and hunger with difficulty—but emerge it did. Now it had to save itself from spring epidemics—corpses, filth, everything left by exhausted people had to be removed from the streets. These same enfeebled people had to do it. Leningraders went into the job of cleaning their city like soldiers going into a frontline attack. They had to clean houses, courtyards and flats, and avoid dying in spring or summer from incurable acute dystrophy and not allow others to die, either. And here there was once again danger, the expectation of an enemy assault. And that vicious night and day shelling, random—“of public squares”, and aimed—at tram stops, military hospitals, cinemas...

“That winter, death looked straight into our eyes, stared long without faltering,” Olga Bergholtz told surviving Leningraders about themselves, as one tells a person about the crisis of an illness after he has come through it—“but it was unable to hypnotise us like a boa hypnotises its intended victim, stripping him of his will and subjugating him. The fascists who sent death to us, once again miscalculated.”

The city was like a man after a severe illness—weak but feeling an incredible surge of spiritual energy, a greed for life.

“I was a nurse at evacuation hospital No. 68 on the corner of Bolshaya Pushkarskaya St.,” *Vera Pavlova* writes from Tosno. “There was no water, no light, almost everyone suffered from diarrhoea due to starvation. And in such a ward people who were practically dying shouted: ‘Lads, it’s victory. Hurrah, hurrah!’ That was April 1942, I think, April 15. And everyone who possibly could, crawled to the window. Hurrah! Victory! It turned out that they’d heard a tram bell clanging, and a tram went past which had stood in Bolshoi Prospekt all winter. If only you’d seen what joy there was! Those who were a bit stronger than the rest said: ‘It’s victory, too!’—they tried to convince one another, to explain...”

In some notes and diaries there is a feeling of the delight, the heady joy of those summer days of 1942, when the city was lavishly bathed in streams of sunlight, belated warmth, when green leaves appeared on the branches, and grass spurted from the upturned soil.

This heedless, unreasoning joy shines through the diary of 19-year-old Galina Babinskaya:

“27th June 1942. The city—how I’m dying to write about it, about our Leningrad! Anyone who hasn’t spent the winter here, has not endured her difficulties themselves, cannot understand the joy of Leningraders when they see the rebirth of their dear city. I feel like talking and talking endlessly about it, about that return to life. Now you particularly notice

the city's revival in every trifle. It's not discernible to the stranger's eye, to the eye that did not see Leningrad in the winter.

"The streets and avenues are quite clean, with tram bells ringing and clanging. How pleasant it is to hear that ringing as you sit at home by the window at your work. The trams speed past, their windows clean and shining, and their bells ringing. There are only a few routes in operation but all the same, they are real trams. And how many lives have those trams saved! Trams have saved lives! Yet people used to say the opposite. We've learned the full meaning of the expression—trams save lives!

"There are crowds at the tram stops. Businesslike people are bustling back and forth in the streets. Now some people are smartly dressed—men, women and children. In the garden by the theatre the crowd is attired the most festively—women with hair done in the latest fashion, wearing elegant shoes and elegant dresses of all colours; men in fancy suits and smart boots. But mainly the military. On some of the girls the greatcoats fit beautifully, and the girls themselves are healthy, pink-cheeked and jolly.

"There are queues at the box offices of cinemas and theatres, at the Musical Comedy Theatre. Before the curtain goes up throngs of people who haven't managed to get tickets gather at the entrances hoping for something. In the gardens of the Young Pioneer Palace there are jazz concerts with Klavdia Shulzhenko and Vladimir Koralli. The recreation park is opening. The Philharmonia are giving concerts. In the streets you see groups of people gathered around billboards displaying the latest newspapers. You see them, too, going into shops selling manufactured goods and food. Saleswomen are in fresh white coats. In front of the shelves there are clean white curtains. Foodstuffs are available on the ration at the right time and without queues. At the street corners there are shoe-blacks. The hairdressers' are full of women having manicures and marcel waves—for which they bring their own paraffin! "

Or, as *S. S. Lokshin* recalls a saying of those days: "Come in with heaters and come out world beaters! "

That's how people saw things after the blockade winter. Here everything was hyperbolised. But this exaggeration, the rejoicing, the tender emotions, the eagerness to see only good points is an indication not so much of spring and summer 1942 as of the ferocity of the past winter, its inhuman horrors.

The fact that the city was cleaned up, that enfeebled hands managed to lift crowbars, to drive spades into the ground, to manoeuvre wheelbarrows, was a miracle. Today, from afar, it all seems natural. They came out day after day into the courtyards, the streets and the city's squares, they broke up the ice, cleared mountains of dirt, garbage, all kinds of muck, cleaned and washed the residue away... It was something like the April *subbotniks* we have now. But at that time the results achieved astonished Leningraders themselves. They hadn't imagined that they would prove



capable of doing what they actually managed to do. The secretaries of Party committees, the chairmen of district executive committees had known that it was essential to accomplish all this, but they had not understood how on earth these wizened people, sluggish through weakness, and resembling ghosts, could possibly cope—doing it all by hand, without machinery and other mechanical aids—with such a gigantic task.

Practically every blockade survivor cherishes the certificate given to those who took part in cleaning up the city.

In summer 1942, the city was warming itself.

People stood or sat in the sun, trying to warm up their bodies, frozen, it seemed, right to the bone. The cold retreated slowly, took its time. Until June the walls of the buildings still exuded cold. The sun meant also light, to which people had also grown unaccustomed. They enjoyed the bright light, opened their windows which had been boarded up with plywood, covered with blankets or rags. The sunlight showed no mercy as it illuminated interiors. Sooty walls and ceilings were exposed, remnants of furniture not yet burnt, parquet flooring wrenched out for firewood, the little makeshift stoves, rags on beds and sofas. Dirt, dirt, filth, broken bits of things, broken glass and china left after bombing... Emptied bookshelves. Everywhere traces of losses and death were noticeable. And what the staircases and courtyards looked like! There were holes in the roofs where incendiary bombs had burnt through, or shrapnel penetrated. A *burzhuika* flue pipe protruded from every window. From beneath the snow appeared the ruins, the skeletons of burnt-out buildings.

People needed the chance to look about them, to see themselves and experience horror at what they saw. That was essential.

The city was coming to life.

Strength came from goodness knows where. People chopped wood, and cut peat for power stations. Water queues vanished, the water supply system was operating again—not everywhere, but water was beginning to be supplied to block after block of flats, if only to the lower storeys. Bath-houses and laundries were opening. A start was made to produce shoe soles—they were stamped out of old car and plane tyres. Clothes were being mended, coats and suits made. But the shelling continued. So did the bombing. Food was short. On the meagre rations, the exhausted body was not able to restore its vigour. Rations were bigger than they had been during the winter—from 11th February 1942 the Leningraders were getting 500 grammes of bread for workers, 400 grammes for non-manual employees and 300 for children and dependants, and cereal and butter were also available. Nevertheless, this was not enough, there was insufficient nourishment, vitamins, vegetables and so on were needed...

“In our courtyard the first leaves have appeared on the tree. From my window I saw a man go up to the tree, tear off the leaves and put them in his mouth. Then he opened a briefcase and began stuffing leaves into that... That tree still stands in our courtyard, by the wall of the house...” (*Vera Bokina*).

You couldn't see a single dandelion left in any of the parks and gardens. People made soup from their leaves; from the fleshy, succulent roots, little flat cakes. You had to travel a good bit further for dandelions—to Udelnaya or Ozerki. Some acquaintance of 12-year-old Marina Tkachova let her into the Zoo to look for dandelions. She can never forget that there, in early summer 1942, she saw a live hippopotamus. It so happened that her neighbour, the woman who had invited her to the Zoo (she worked at the Hippopotamus House), was the one who saved the hippo. That is one of those true Leningrad legends about which, unfortunately, Marina cannot remember much detail. She remembers only the fear and delight with which she passed the cage, looking askance at the animal, and how afterwards the neighbour took her to where the grass and the dandelions were. She also recalls a woman attendant passing by and muttering something angrily about the dandelions being taken away by strangers. She was probably thinking of the welfare of the Zoo's animals.

“They started selling all manner of grasses and herbs at the markets, asking 30 or 40 roubles for 100 grammes of sorrel—and occasionally they expected some bread. I bought some nettles and made soup, and the following day I made some with goosefoot grass. What people have been reduced to by hunger! You see a respectable-looking woman bent over, pinching out the tops of herbs and putting them into her mouth, like a goat” (from the diary of *Olga Epstein*).

People went to have a good wash at the baths, got themselves into order, cleaned up their homes, dug their vegetable plots, and stocked up firewood, preparing for the following winter well beforehand.

In July 1942 *Lyubov Filippova* received the best possible gift she might have wished for—a parcel of goosefoot. At that time it was a valuable gift, but what is also important here was what led up to this gift. The recipient is still moved when the incident is mentioned. This is how it happened.

In the winter she had received a letter from the front, written by Ilya Kovbas, a comrade of hers at the city Komsomol committee, asking whether there was anything she could do to help his wife and daughter. Lyubov herself was receiving only 200 grammes of bread a day, so what could she do? But she was a woman of great drive and determination, and there was good reason for her heading the Party organisation at the State Public Library.

"I thought I'd go to see Pyotr Popkov, chairman of the city executive committee. How could I get to him? I'd use my deputy's pass. After all, it wasn't for myself but to help someone else. They gave me a note to the Tambovsky Cold Storage—to draw 200 grammes of rusks, a bar of chocolate, some dried potatoes and cereal. I'd gone to see Popkov early in the morning, and from there I went on to the cold storage. I was so happy to have got so much food. So long as I found Kovbas's family alive! (Ilya Kovbas was now the commissar of a brigade.) I reached the Neva. It was already evening by then. To cut the distance, I didn't go across the bridge but across the river—there was a path across the ice, leading to the Alexandrovsky Garden. There was a terrible blizzard raging. That was the most crucial test of my life, you know. I had the parcel, there was chocolate in it, and there I was, walking across the Neva and now I was falling down. If only I could restrain myself from eating it! Words can't convey that feeling! It was a terrible thing. I had chocolate and dried potato, and I just had to get them to their destination. You understand? I was walking across the Neva. The blizzard was raging with such force that I was afraid I wouldn't make it. I don't know how I managed not to go off my head. But all the same I kept on walking, walking. I got to Lenin Street, and found the house. I went up to the second floor, and looked for the room they were living in (it was a communal flat). I went in. I felt better now I'd brought the things to their destination."

"The struggle with yourself was harder for you than sticking out against the blizzard?"

"I can't convey it to you. It was dreadful. When I set foot in that room I felt relieved because I'd delivered the things. I, too, was hungry and ill, and I could hardly move, but I was happy now. My one idea now was—may they be alive! I saw a bed on one side, and another bed on the other side. I asked: 'Ksenia? Lusya?' In reply came the voice of Ksenia Kovbas and the stronger one of her daughter. 'I've brought greetings from your father!' You can't imagine what it was like! I dragged out a chair and some books that had survived, lit the little stove, and put on water to boil. Of course, they got up. We sat down by the stove. They offered me some



of what I'd brought, and I ate it without feeling awkward, for otherwise I couldn't have got back from Lenin Street to the Public Library. That was a very happy incident. I'm glad to say that they both survived. Later I arranged for them to leave the city, to go into evacuation. That, too, was done through the city Party committee. And then came this most precious gift I received during the blockade. I came home one day and there was this great big parcel, addressed to Lyubov Filippova. To be exact, that was after they'd risen from their beds and were stronger, in the spring. It was later that I got them evacuated. They had shared that package of food and had both survived. They were now living on Krestovsky Island, were on their feet, were picking goosefoot, and in spring 1942 they sent that parcel to me with a touching letter. We used the goosefoot to make such rissoles! What a feast we had! They had both been on the verge of death, the girl and Ksenia. And that extra ration I'd brought them, which they ate little by little, had saved them, I believe. I also recall there were some dandelions, too, which we also ate. But the main thing was goosefoot grass. Dandelions were for salad, and very good rissoles could be made out of goosefoot. It was a luxurious present! "

Here is a story told by Z. A. Ignatovich:

"That first spring, 1942, when grasses and herbs appeared, people seemed to be transformed into animals: they tore up any kind of grass and ate it. Not a blade of grass remained anywhere. Once a colleague—Sofia Khatanova, and I travelled to the Botanical Gardens, for we wanted to get them to agree to send us various grasses and herbs for analysis. We had to ascertain which grasses were poisonous and which were not. The Botanical Gardens were locked. We rang the bell. When we went in, we saw chervil growing as high as this! My goodness! We were asked to wait until a researcher came. We started eating that chervil rightaway with such enjoyment! "

"Chervil—is that a herb?"

"Yes. Its leaves are like those of the carrot. And we ate our fill of that chervil. No one was bothering, there was no one about, and we ate it. When Nikitin came out to see us, we felt embarrassed. We agreed, of course, about sending grasses and herbs for analysis. Then we asked him: 'May we pick some chervil?' 'It's a weed,' he told us. I said that it was all the same to us. So the two of us stuffed two bags with it, and brought it back to the laboratory. We ate it all up, and were content. What enjoyment it gave us to eat that weed: we'd eaten our fill of chervil! "

"June 1942. Every day the organism grew weaker, although the bread ration had increased. I was already getting 400 grammes a day, but I still felt hungry... The bombing, shelling and air raid alarms continued, but it was good that we were warming ourselves in the sun, like flies...

"July 1942. It's warm outdoors. The leaves on the trees have come out and the grass has grown. Mother and I, and some other people went to the cemetery and gathered some roots, which we boiled and ate. There were scarcely any nettles or grass, as hungry people had gathered them all for food..." (From the diary of *Ulyana Popova*).

By that time Ulyana Popova had begun to work as a cashier in a canteen. Speaking of her work, she recalled both the menus and the way things were done in the canteen at that time:

"We served soup made from dried seakale and yeast, we served porridge—200 grammes per coupon, and also served some people baked oilseed meal.

"People licked the plates clean... In the evenings I used to stick the cut out coupons onto paper, in hundreds... There was nothing to stick them onto. There was no paper. We stuck them onto newspaper or onto old sheet music that people brought in to us."

Each story is different, the teller's very own, with unique personal perceptions of spring 1942. People emerged from the blockade winter differently, returned to life differently. But not all of them recovered their faith.

It was interesting to refer to the fullest of all the diaries—to see how Georgi Knyazev greeted spring and summer 1942 on his own "small radius". Tiredness shows through his diary entries. He is always encouraging himself, cheering himself up, but that becomes more and more difficult for him.

"26th May 1942. Academician Ukhtomsky, the physiologist, is in bad health. He has developed gangrene as a result of scurvy. The doctors consider his condition hopeless. Academician Krachkovsky's health vacillates all the time, like a candle flame. A few days ago the doctors discussed his case. The city's finest doctors have put him under observation."

"3rd June. Outside our archives the gates have been demolished for firewood... Some 'hunters' are sawing up beams from the attics... The most terrible thing for Leningraders is the question: How are we to get through the winter?"

"12th June. Matryona Yefimovna, our former housekeeper, who I took on temporarily, is dying before my very eyes. She has a dependant's ration card. Today she has turned black all over. She told me that hunger diarrhoea has started."

He was desperately anxious to maintain objectivity. He carefully noted everything good, any successes, any indications of the revival of life.

"22nd June. On the vegetable plots in Rumyantsev Garden, corn shoots have appeared... I don't come across any vehicles carrying corpses—neither hand-drawn, nor motorised. Probably they don't take them at the time I go to work. I see a few people, including not such old ones, walking with difficulty, some even supporting themselves against the walls of buildings. Opposite our house, on the very embankment, women continue to dig trenches.

"The city, at any rate my part of it, on a small sector of the radius, is very clean; it is swept every day. The yardkeepers are all women, every one of them. Today a house-painter glazed one of the windows of the Arts Academy."

"28th June. There is great alarm in my heart. Outside Sevastopol there are constant bitter battles... Should I write any more here? It would be too difficult.

"We who are living today cannot see everything, and perhaps what we do see is not at all what should go down in history. Are such notes as mine perhaps too one-sided, too subjective?... All the same, I shall continue to write. I have already made it clear dozens of times that I am keeping these notes as a contemporary of great events, but not as an active participant in them. I must, I have a duty to continue with this, to go on writing my notes for as long as I am in a condition to do so.

"M.F.* is becoming disastrously thin. The ration cards aren't enough. They're not issuing food. We can't manage to buy anything at the price demanded by the speculators. I grit my teeth and look fate in the eye...

"I had to break off my entry. Shells have been whining and howling over the roof and exploding somewhere nearby. I went to the window. In the little garden in the courtyard small children are digging in the sand, and someone is walking through with a pitcher. Bright sunshine, an almost clear sky. Thank goodness, M.F. has just come home. We're together. What's there to worry about? I'll carry on.

"Once again terrible thoughts have come into my head... The non-issue of the ration has placed us in a difficult position. M.F. feels ill.

"I'm fighting, and I'll keep fighting. I'm now going to check the staff on duty at the archives. I'll do my duty to the end..."

The spring and summer of 1942 were perceived differently by Georgi Knyazev and 19-year-old Galina Babinskaya. At first it seems that these are two quite different cities. Or different periods of the blockade. But once you think about it, look into things more closely, it turns out that they do not invalidate each other, do not even contradict each other. Both one and the other versions existed. Everything depended upon who was looking at things and his point of view. We have presented several different pictures to bring alive for you the slowly reviving Leningrad of 1942, where people were still dying—those not strong enough to recover from dystrophy—and also where people were digging, cultivating every scrap of land in gardens, parks and boulevards for vegetables. One can understand how Galina Babinskaya saw every trifle in magnified form. Two or three encounters with women in summer shoes and dresses was an event, a hope, a happy omen. The sight of a shoeblack brought a delighted reaction. But you can also understand Georgi Knyazev, who realised that the blockade was continuing. Enemy guns would again fire pointblank at Leningrad, a second blockade winter was ahead, and strength was ebbing away.

* M. F.—Maria Fyodorovna, Knyazev's wife.

It is also possible to understand the mood of 14-year-old schoolgirl D. Lozovskaya, which leaves its stamp upon her diary:

"21st June. One day to the anniversary of the war. Today we did algebra for four hours, but I don't know if I'll pass the exam. I'm afraid I'll fail. After dinner I went to the cinema, and saw 'Mashenka'. I can only say that the film was passable, nothing more... I'm so frightened of algebra, I just don't know what to do."

"26th June. The ordeal's over! I've done well in literature, and got a four in geometry. I'm very glad, because yesterday, instead of preparing for the exams I went for a walk with Asya in the park. Incidentally, in the Young Pioneer Palace garden two very nice boys go to walk, Roma and Leva. They were at the same rest home as Asya for their holidays. I liked them very much. Those boys are good in every sense—cultured, polite, well dressed—you can't fault them... For lunch they gave us two soya cakes with thickened fruit jelly, a glass of sweetened coffee and 100 grammes of bread. It was all very tasty. For dinner we had pea soup, some kind of fish with noodles, a cup of fruit drink and 200 grammes of bread. For supper, baked soya pudding with tomato sauce, a glass of sweet tea (with saccharin) and 100 grammes of bread."

There was something quite different nearby. Maria Shchelyvanova gave us her photograph. She showed it to us, herself horrified:

"You see what hair, what a face, just like someone dead. I had these plaits, but because of starvation my hair was starting to fall out. I told my friend: 'I'm going to cut off my hair, what good is it to me? There's no soap, there's nothing...' That was in 1942, getting on for autumn. For the last time I let my hair down—and she took my photograph. Just look what a terrible face I had! "

From the many first-hand accounts we have selected not only those that are similar, but differing, diverging, even contradictory accounts. We did not want to extract an average from them. The average is not the same thing as the truth.

All the four Gospels gave accounts of the same thing. Four authors describe one and the same life, one and the same events, but each does it in his own way. And if one approaches these works as a literary phenomenon, the question arises—why, for what reason, did the four stories exist side by side? Why did the readers' interest not fade, decrease as they read each new account? Each gave less information than its predecessors, less and less that was new. The authors repeat one another—although each has his own vernacular, choice of facts and vision of life. Nevertheless, all four narratives are more interesting taken together than is each one separately. They form a kind of stable whole, despite all the repetition, despite the various interpretations... Or perhaps precisely because of them. They support, help and illuminate one another, for some reason

not interfering with but rather reinforcing one another. The enigmatic, complex mutual influence they exert on one another does not fall within the well-known laws of literature. When Renan tried, on the basis of the four Gospels and all the literature on the subject, to write his *Life of Jesus*, it resulted in a work without artistic force. The same thing happened with Tolstoy's Gospels, though better integrated than before, and more accurate. The example is instructive.

The four Gospels form a work of four dimensions; it can be approached from all sides, that is, one can view the history of Christ from four angles. People's contradictory, many-sided narrative of the blockade is sometimes repetitive, sometimes not, at times rushes on ahead, at others goes deeply into the suffering and the ordeal. Incidentally, this is not merely a matter of suffering—suffering reveals to us more important things, that is, the limits of human beings. It expands the limits of human strength and of the heights attainable, stretching them to a point which had formerly been unthinkable, to where it is impossible to observe the laws of morality, where the spirit perishes, yet, somehow, a man is able to remain Man.

THAT IMMORTAL, ETERNAL MARIA IVANOVNA

You remember Maria Ivanovna, from the housing office, commander of a civil defence group? She's still there, among the houses she supervised. Today her memory darts among the houses and hostels, drawing us there, too, to where shells exploded noisily in clouds of dust or, on the contrary, to where it was suspiciously quiet, or to a place she went in response to a letter from a soldier at the front who was anxious because he heard nothing from his family.

Maria Dmitrieva has now taken up gardening and is expecting her granddaughters to stay for the summer ("Two wonderful schoolgirls!"). She writes letters to her daughter who lives in the Far North with her pilot husband and she discusses the local news with her neighbours. But at the slightest reminder, her blockade memory takes her back there, among her houses.

"There was very heavy shelling on Shvetsov Street, at No. 38. Or rather this is what happened—at first, we all thought it was heavy, but when the 'katyushas' were brought in that's when it really started. There's a scrap-metal works here, and that's where they laid some rails and installed the 'katyushas'... They'd be rolled out, aimed and fired. Then the 'katyushas' would be rolled back but we'd still be there to be fired upon. The shelling was so heavy that houses would be completely destroyed. If I'm not mistaken, that was somewhere in March. It was in the daytime. I remember I'd had breakfast and was on my way to the office. Another heavy attack started. I managed to get to the office. I don't remember who it was that shouted: 'Maria Ivanovna! They've shelled some houses over there!' A shell had hit No. 33. Well, it was very difficult to get to the house. I went

there, and I managed to get through somehow. It was quite a long way off, the house stood apart from all others, nearer to Tentelevka Street. Anyway, I got there and went in. But it was rather unusually constructed inside—there was a long corridor that stretched right through to the back with doors leading off it on either side. Some builders were living in it or someone like that.”

“You mean it was a hostel?”

“Yes, like a hostel. These were just rooms, not flats. And a very long corridor. It was a two-storey building. So I went along the ground floor but there was no one there. I knocked on the doors but they were all locked. Then I went upstairs and saw that a wall had been damaged. It was a wooden house and the shell had hit a corner of its roof and knocked the beams perpendicular. But it was only that one corner, the rest of the house was all right.”

“You thought there might have been people in those rooms that were locked?”

“That’s exactly what I thought but I couldn’t get any answers from inside. Then just as I was turning round to go back (the shelling hadn’t stopped and shell fragments kept hitting the house), I heard a noise like an animal howling wildly in a loud, piercing voice. I stopped. Then went outside and looked up at the first floor to see if any part of it was damaged. I listened carefully to see if I could tell where the sound was coming from. Then I saw it was coming out of the room that had been hit. I went up to the door of that room to check. But the door was so tightly shut that it wouldn’t budge even the slightest little bit. Then a boy came running up to me—he was fifteen or sixteen years old. I’d really like to find him now, to see him. It was Yura Lebedev. I remembered him. His parents had been evacuated a long time ago. He’d also told me that his elder brother was a pilot and had gone to fight at the front. He’d been a pupil at a training school for railway workers. They had a room upstairs (that was damaged too). And he appeared suddenly as if from thin air. (After the training school was evacuated Yura often came to help us—to put out the incendiaries and do all sorts of other things.) Anyway, I said: ‘Where’s the howling coming from?’ ‘Oh, it’s Dusya!’ He knew everyone who lived in the house. ‘But how are we going to get in? The door won’t budge.’ ‘Stay here, Maria Ivanovna,’ he said, ‘just wait here a minute.’ He was thin and very agile and he went round the other side. They were firing from this side of the house but he got round to the other side and shouted: ‘I can get through this hole the shell’s made in the wall.’ ‘Be careful of the shrapnel.’ Then I heard him shout: ‘I’m in.’ We couldn’t get the door open. The impact of the shell had knocked a lot of things over. There was this large wardrobe that had fallen across the door. Yura moved the wardrobe and opened the door for me. The room was obscured by a mist of chalk and lime—it had all come down from the ceiling. There were great heaps of plaster in the room. After this cloud settled a little I was able to see a bed. It was covered in plaster and then there was a settee or an ottoman also covered with it. And planks of wood scattered all round the room. ‘Wait, Yura, don’t move,’ I said. Then I heard a squeak—it might have been a cat squashed under all the rubble. ‘Wait, Yura, we must be careful.’ And

then suddenly we heard this woman wailing. She was lying under the bed semi-conscious—she'd been injured. She was squashed under the bed for some reason. It was a low iron bed and she was jammed in underneath it."

"Perhaps she got under it to hide from the shelling?"

"Maybe she had, but more likely she'd been blown there by blast. And again we heard her howling in this terrible voice. That's how we knew there was someone under the bed. And then we heard the squeaking again—it sounded just like a kitten. We didn't know just where to start. 'Yura, be careful where you step,' I said, 'you might squash something.' You know, we tiptoed between the planks and the mounds of plaster."

"Those that were on the bed?"

"No, we didn't touch the bed. Just those on the floor. Now about the table. It had obviously stood in the centre of the room but there wasn't much of it left now—just the planks lying on the floor. I went up and as I trod on the middle one it moved by itself. Much to my amazement (I was so astonished that I still don't know how I didn't bite my own tongue off!) there was a baby underneath it. It was dirty, covered in clay or something, and in lime, and it was wet! "

"It was naked? It had just been born?"

"Yes, of course, just born, fresh from his mother's womb. And, you know, the umbilical cord still connected it to her. Right across through all the rubble to the bed it stretched... Terrible! I've never seen anything like it. But somehow I was galvanised into action. 'Go and find some water,' I said to Yura. 'Water and a pair of scissors!' He went off to look. He searched around (their room was also upstairs) and came back saying: 'I couldn't find any scissors, Maria Ivanovna. Here's a knife though, and a flask of pine infusion.' 'Well, it's probably made with boiled water,' I said. 'It'll do.' And there were these beautiful knitted hangings by the bed. I pulled one out from under the rubble and tore off a piece from the edge to tie round the umbilical cord. I simply shook all the dust off it, there wasn't much else I could do, we just didn't have anything else. I covered the baby with the curtaining and laid it on a corner of the bed. I wrapped it up and it squealed. It was choking on all the dirt and so it couldn't cry, it was mewling like a kitten. Then I said: 'Well, I've tied that round the umbilical cord, now I'd better cut it to stop it from trailing all over the place.' But I had no idea how much to cut. I must have left about eight centimetres."

"You'd never delivered a baby?"

"No, I hadn't, how could I? I'd never done it or even seen a baby delivered. Anyway, I cut the cord with the knife. And tied up the end."

"Did Yura help?"

"You know what he told me? 'We're going to get the woman out now,' I said. And he replied: 'Maria Ivanovna, I can't, I'm embarrassed.' 'What do you mean! We're saving two lives! And you're talking about feeling embarrassed! How do you think doctors feel? No nonsense now! I don't want to hear any more of this.' So he started helping me. I wrapped the baby up and said: 'Pour me some water here.' And he poured me a little from the flask. I started clearing the baby's mouth out to let it breathe

better. And then it started to cry properly. It'd been choking on all the dirt before. We cleared a space on the bed and put the baby there. It stayed quiet. 'Let's get her out now.' But how should we do it? She turned out to be a big strong woman with long hair that spread out all over the floor. Long, long hair, it must have come down to her knees—beautiful fair hair. My god! How we pulled and pulled to get her out. And I saw her head was hurt—must have been a piece of shrapnel. Her hair was caked to her head with all the blood and the dirt. And when she moved it must have really hurt because that's when she cried out. 'You know,' I said to Yura, 'I'm sure she'll forgive us if she lives. Let's cut it so it won't bother her quite so much.' "

"You mean her hair?"

"Yes. And I cut the strand of hair round the wound. I left the rest of it and tied it up. I just cut the hair that had stuck to the wound. 'They'll wash it in hospital,' I said. Well, we got her out. She was still unconscious. And sometimes she would set up this tigerish howling. It was terrible! We lowered her by the settee, having managed to clear all the rubble out of the way. We were able to walk about quite easily now that we'd cleared up the floor. We'd got her to the settee but we just couldn't lift her onto it. And a lot of the rubble had dragged across the floor after her. The afterbirth hadn't come out, you know. 'Yura, hold her up. We'll lift her a little higher. Only keep hold, put your knee under her. And I'll start lifting her up here.' Eventually we got her up! Soon after we'd lifted her onto the settee and while we were clearing up the rest of the mess, a girl came running in. 'Maria Ivanovna,' she shouted. 'Maria Ivanovna, are you all right?' We'd forgotten all about the shelling. It still hadn't finished, there were flares and shrapnel! The girl was Musya Smirnova from No. 36. I don't know what flat number. A young girl about the same age as Yura—sixteen probably. 'I'm all right, Musya, I'm still alive.' And then I added, 'We must get a car here immediately. Go back and phone. Careful how you go!' 'I'll be careful. You watch out, they're still shelling this place.' And then she told me: 'Maria Ivanovna! Tentelevka, No. 67 has been hit as well, a shell went right through it, and knocked a stove over.' All the sick had been lying in that house and this big round stove fell onto their legs! They all died. 'Musya,' I said, 'we must finish everything here first. Call a car. Tell them a woman's just had a baby, they'll soon be here.' And they really were quick. We hadn't even had time to finish clearing up when the car arrived. I handed the woman and child over to them."

"You don't remember the name or surname at all?"

"Her name was Dusya. But her surname? If you find this Yura Lebedev, he'll know, of course. They lived in the same house. He lived up on the first floor. He knows everyone. Something like... No, I don't want to say it because I'll have it wrong most likely. I tried making inquiries afterwards. Or rather not quite. I was called to the House of Culture once—it must have been two years later, after the war. I was asked there to tell them about some incidents I'd been involved in. There were girls taking it all down in shorthand there. And when I'd finished I said, 'But what I don't know, I never even looked to see if the baby was a boy or a girl. I'm very sorry I didn't. And I don't even know if it's alive now.' Then a

woman got up and said: 'Maria Ivanovna! The little boy's alive, and so is his mother.' They were given a room after she left the hospital. They were in hospital near Chornaya Rechka, in the Petrogradskaya Storona district for quite a long time. But I never found them. I kept thinking of writing to the Information Bureau—perhaps they'd have found them."

"And what happened to Yura after that?"

"I don't know anything about him, either. When it was all over he vanished. Probably he was given a room. Yura Lebedev. His brother was a pilot. His mother and father had been evacuated."

When the bankrupt "thousand-year Reich" was collapsing beneath the weight of its crimes and fascist Berlin was directly threatened by encirclement and attack, Hitler suddenly recalled Leningrad.

In a circular issued by Himmler, who had become commander of the Vistula Group, Leningrad was quoted as an example of civilian behaviour and of how a city can be turned into an unassailable fortress. The circular concluded with the phrase: "The hatred felt by the population was an important motivating mechanism for defence."

With what "scientific" cold-bloodedness they had tried to strangle, destroy Leningrad, to wipe it from the face of the earth! But it hadn't worked. Now they were "scientifically" (on the basis of the Leningrad experience) trying to save their own capital. But in neither place could their cannibalistic "science" or their most far-sighted orders solve their problem and bring them victory. It required something bigger than animal fear of retribution, something more than saving their own skins. Something more powerful than the fear of death. It required precisely that factor to which the people of Leningrad clung, which nourished the will and heroism of the Soviet people in and around Moscow, in Sevastopol, in Stalingrad, in partisan territories and republics—a sense of great, lofty human rightness and of justification for struggle to the last breath.

Maria Ivanovna, the immortal, eternal Maria Ivanovna did not surrender. It was those who had tried to kill her with bombs and shells, to bury her beneath the walls of ruined houses, to starve her to death, to kill her with cold, fatigue and hopelessness—it was them who surrendered. She and that nameless little boy who was born in the very kingdom of death were the victors.

Life was victorious.



PART TWO

THREE OUT OF THREE MILLION

In the early days of the war, despite the rapid advance of the fascist hordes, no one could as yet foresee the wartime fate of Leningrad or what was in store for its citizens.

The word "blockade", one that has taken unto itself all conceivable and inconceivable difficulties, agonies and sufferings, did not immediately come to the fore and establish itself firmly in the troubled lives of Leningraders. Something ominous had taken place, was bearing down upon them, and Leningraders eagerly sought to find precisely where their personal efforts, their self-sacrifice were required, where there was a need for their readiness to fight, and if necessary, to die. Anything was better than this helpless anticipation of the very worst. In action, in the common cause, the main cause, they were resolved to find an outlet for their rage and anxiety.

The Volunteers! The People's Volunteers! This became a hope, an assurance, sounding out as if summoned from the historic past of the people, from the heroic past of this revolutionary city.

The word was found, the cause was there—for the thousands upon thousands ready to give everything, to take everything upon themselves...

On the first day of the war, 22nd June, 1941, a long queue formed outside the doors of the Party Committee of the Kirov Works. And below, on the ground floor, another queue stretched outside the doors of the Komsomol Committee. It was several days before the last of those queuing reached the doors. In the queues stood elderly workers and young men, even girls and women; there were Komsomol organisers, Party organisers, activists and others who could not remotely be described as activists, quite passive people—as they had until then been considered, non-Party members, non-members of the Komsomol.

People were writing out applications as they stood in the corridors, on the staircases, by the windows, resting their papers on the sills. They

were doing their best to explain as convincingly as possible why they had to be sent to the front, and that, without delay. They ascribed military abilities to themselves. They tried to prove they were artillerymen—because their shop built guns. Apart from that side of it, they had to show that the works could manage without them, and had to get permission from the shop superintendent. For the plant was on defence work, was producing tanks, and everybody was needed and had so-called exemption papers. In the Party Committee the volunteers had a still harder time of it. Among them were foremen, designers, engineers—the cream of the works, the Putilov Guard. If they had given permission to go to all who were straining to get to the front line, into anti-tank battalions, the plant would have had to stop work.

Even before the announcement was made about the formation of the People's Volunteers (the decision was taken on the eighth day of war), there were similar long queues at all the factories, all district enlistment offices, everywhere... What splendid, passionate, indignant, pleading applications and petitions there were! All written in the touchingly naive conviction that if their writers were allowed through they would immediately rout and destroy the enemy. It was quite clear, they believed, that they, who came from the Kirov, the old Putilov Works, had priority rights to join the People's Volunteers. What's more, they got priority—the Kirov Division was the first of the People's Volunteer Divisions!

Beyond the Narva Gates the platoons and companies of the first members of the People's Volunteers were undergoing training. In the parks they learnt how to crawl on their bellies and throw hand grenades. They



marched zealously in step—still in light shoes, sandals and belted raincoats. They dossed down at night in the workers' club. It often transpired that this man from a planning department and that pattern-maker had fought in the Civil War, that they were sappers, cavalymen and not simply old folk who could not run very fast with boxes of shells. Many of them had been at one time fighting men, officers...

For the young ones that was all still ahead. The dismal July bulletins could not dampen the enthusiastic mood. Field shirts, greatcoats and dark blue trousers were issued, and the volunteers strutted proudly about the factory when they went to say goodbye, and everybody envied them. Trainloads of them left, and they went off singing "Far beyond the Narva Gates a lad marched off to war..."

The daily round of war descended immediately, beyond Luga, bringing the first bombing raids, the whine of diving planes, the first battles and the first graves.

The People's Volunteers was, of course, a special army. Hastily trained, with no experience under fire, scantily provided with weapons, and with its discipline by no means up to military standards, but rather at factory level. All around were their own people, from the factory. The company commander was a foreman, his platoon commanders were a mechanic and a factory team-leader. The men addressed their officers by their first name and patronymic. Battle after battle would be necessary before army rank began to take priority over factory prestige.

On the other hand this army had certain advantages—it rapidly adapted to conditions of war that were not customary for regular officers. And the members of that volunteer army knew the cost of every gun, every tank, for they had put their share of work into it...

The newly formed divisions had to face terrible ordeals. Even people who took part in those events have difficulty explaining how the volunteer regiments and batteries were able to hold their ground—and, what's more, to halt nazi columns of heavy tanks with air support, and their key motorized divisions which had crossed the whole of Europe. It was a miracle—but a miracle of what? No, it wasn't the courage of despair. Clinging doggedly to the earth, deafened by bombing, they stood to the death, realising full well that now everything depended on themselves, on the workers from the Narva Gates, on the shipbuilders, men from the Kirov Works, dockers, teachers, composers, historians... The rye was burning, the villages were burning, there was oppressive heat, acrid smoke and the sour smell of explosives, and everywhere the rattle of German sub-machine guns. Our volunteers—with grenades and bottles of gas mixture—lay in ambush, in order to let the tanks come nearer.

All sorts of things can happen at war. But the Kirov Division did not flee. The regiments went on fighting, were caught in encirclement and broke through forest and bog to Leningrad.

The city formed more and more new divisions—in the Moscow district, the Frunze, the Kalinin and the Oktyabrsky districts, and they rallied round their banners people from all walks of life and positions. Among those who joined up were the well-known artist Nikolai Cherkasov, Leonid Popov, a teacher, Party official Alexander Yermolayev, Profes-

sor Kirill Ogorodnikov, literary scholar Isaak Yampolsky. No one gave thought to the matter of how best to use their knowledge. That may have been wasteful—but to them becoming a soldier was more important than any thoughts about the usefulness of their own professions. This was the patriotism of the time, this was what they considered the most essential thing.

Losses, wounded—nothing could stop the volunteers. There was only one thing they feared—running out of ammunition, not having enough rifles to fire from.

The city gave its finest men to the army. The People's Volunteers was a school of courage. Its members displayed legendary heroism, people such as Dmitri Podrezov, head of the political department of the Kirov Division, or Feodosi Smolyachkov, a renowned frontline sniper.

The epic of the Leningrad People's Volunteers transformed the city. Through the people it had in the volunteers every enterprise was directly linked with the army and the war. After the September battles the volunteers merged with the regular divisions of the Red Army. Those battles on the distant approaches to the city turned volunteers into soldiers. Every hour, every day, war was teaching them something, doing a thoroughly reliable job.

When one of the two authors of this book was sitting in the frozen trenches beyond Shushari in that winter of 1941-42, his thoughts would involuntarily turn to the factory, the old familiar streets, the Narva Gates, the restaurant where the members of our factory Komsomol committee gathered informally for a farewell. Some were going into an aviation unit, others into an artillery division. We said goodbye lightheartedly and confidently, not thinking that many of us would never come back.

We lived for news from the factory. Work went on in the half-empty, rime-coated shops. There was already another Kirov Works now, evacuated to Chelyabinsk, to the Chelyabinsk Tractor Works, and from there news came only rarely. Those who had gone off to join the People's Volunteers used to write directly to their old shops, for to many that was all they had left of civilian life. The other members of their family had died, their friends were at the front, and there was only their factory left. True enough, much had changed at the factory, evacuated somewhere beyond the Urals, but be that as it may, this was the last thing that was still theirs. And their fellow workers, in fact, remained faithful to them, looked after their children, and their mothers, remembered them and waited for them to come back.

Once we had a talk with Konstantin Simonov in Minsk. It was about how he had collected the stories of soldiers who had been awarded the Order of Glory, and also how he had recorded the reminiscences of Soviet Marshals—Zhukov, Rokossovsky and Konev. Although each of them had had memoirs published, he still recorded their stories, and from each one he collected hundreds of pages of newly revealed reminiscences, which for some reason or other had not been included in their books. In this way he had amassed invaluable material. "We must,"



Simonov had said, "at least record everything it's possible to record. This is material not only for the historians but also for future writers, for those who will prove able to write the epic of the Great War."

He was absolutely right. Thanks to his energy the evidence of soldiers and important military commanders was recorded, and film shots and short film stories amassed. Simonov did a tremendous amount of historical work. As far as he was concerned, such work represented self-sacrifice—in it he sacrificed himself as a writer. Instead of writing his own novels and stories he was gathering the testimonies of others, acting purely as a chronicler, a collector, a memory-jogger...

While giving credit to Konstantin Simonov for the great work he had done in this regard, we still could not entirely shake off our doubts whether our work on *A Book of the Blockade* had any point. Why were we dragging into the light of day and reconstructing all the human sufferings and ordeals of that time? History had already extracted what it needed from the Leningrad siege, had erected a memorial to its heroism and courage—what exactly were we looking for?

We were interested in *sources*. How different people came to the realisation that it was necessary to endure any deprivation for the sake of victory. How there arose the spirit of fortitude, of resistance, preserving the determination not to yield and also human dignity in the most desperate circumstances. We had to seek out the actual process, not a version corrected in the knowledge of victory won. The only way to find out, to discover what took place in people's hearts, was to turn to the documents of that time. The best of these were people's diaries, which made it possible to see the inner life of the diarist without the corrections that stem from hindsight. Our diarists knew nothing of the forthcoming victory. They did not know whether they would survive, or what would happen to Leningrad, or to the country. They were beset by doubts, even despair, but even at that time, if one reads the diaries carefully, it is clear that there lived within them a faith in the triumph of justice. Furthermore, their faith showed itself in that they were convinced—Leningrad would hold out. Finally, and this was the most remarkable thing—we can see how that faith gradually grew stronger, even though day by day things were getting worse and worse, the hunger more terrible, and a deathly gloom was engulfing their hopes.

Two days before his death Derzhavin wrote his last verse on a slate. Never before had he written so simply. With a feeble hand he carefully traced out the words, with them rising above the life he had lived, above time, above the powerful epoch of Catherine the Great's reign.

*Borne away are human problems
In the flow of time's quick stream
Consigning to the abyss of blankness
Peoples, kingdoms and their kings.
But if anything remains,
Breaking through the lyre's strains,
Swallowed by infinity,
As all that's gone before it'll be.*

It takes considerable courage to leave this world, consigning to oblivion all you have admired, all that you've lived and worked for. But what strikes the imagination even more is the thought that if anything remains behind for a little longer, then it is what is celebrated by lyres and trumpets, that is, by the poet, the composer, the artist.

Contemporaries are not destined to know which of the experiences they have lived through will be selected by history, what will rot in the newspaper files and what will be transformed into legend. One would like to think, of course, that the Leningrad blockade will be remembered for a long time by the peoples of the world. But how will it be seen by posterity? How is time likely to remodel it, what will be made of the thousands of tragedies, what myth will be created from the fortitude and the horror, from the cold and the hunger? We shall never know, just as the people within beleaguered Troy did not know that of the nine-year siege of their city mankind would keep alive the myth of the beauteous Helen, the Trojan Horse, and the golden apple of discord. How many other wars there were in those times, wars that were far more significant and terrible, yet preserved in the living memory of mankind is the one linked with the small city of Troy. This, of course, is partly due to the author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, but history has its own freakish whims and injustices, often casting into oblivion heroes and sacrifices borne by the peoples. But Leningrad... Why that sense of a future legend, a feeling that it will live on for years to come? It must not be lost... Not because this was our wish, but because in the heroic feat of the people of Leningrad heights of the human spirit had been reached which cannot possibly fade from memory.

The three of them, the chief characters in our book, never met, never knew one another. Two men and one woman. The first is *Georgi Knyazev*, a historian, the second a fifteen-year-old boy, *Yura Ryabinkin*, and the third *Lydia Okhapkina*.

For the first part of *A Book of the Blockade* we made tape-recordings and collected stories told today by people who had come through the siege, while for the second part we mainly used diaries of the time.

During the blockade many people kept diaries. And some made notes of their experiences when they were still fresh in the mind. We were brought or sent notebooks and old ledgers, in which people had, sometimes with a benumbed hand, left a record of their experiences in pencil or in faded ink, some in neat handwriting, others in a scrawl, some briefly, some at length. From all these diaries and collections of notes we chose these three that made the biggest impression on us, three different destinies.

They are authentic, and from them it is possible to trace in detail the inner development of our characters throughout the blockade. Not a single word has been added or changed, we have only taken the liberty of cutting, of deleting repetitions or notes irrelevant to what was taking place.



*The house where Georgi Knyazev lived during the blockade.
On the wall are twenty seven memorial plaques with the
names of prominent Russian 18th-20th century scientists
and scholars who lived in this house.*

They are not lavish with memorial plaques in Leningrad. There are too many places and buildings worthy of being honoured, singled out. So the house on Vasilevsky Island always attracts attention.

If you walk along the Neva embankment from the University towards the granite sphinxes lying above the water by what used to be the Academy of Arts and is now the Repin Institute, you will see, immediately after the sphinxes, a three-storey house with a portico supported by four Doric columns. An old house, bearing the stamp of St Petersburg's charming, modest architecture, it was rebuilt by the well-known St Petersburg architect Zakharov in 1806-1808. There are cast iron memorial plaques on each of its walls—probably there is not another house in Leningrad, or in Moscow, or perhaps even in the whole world with as many memorial plaques. There are 27 altogether. The house belongs to the Academy of Sciences. Among those who have lived here have been Yakov Grot, reformer of Russian orthography and compiler of a Russian dictionary; Fyodor Uspensky, specialist in Byzantine studies; Alexander Orlov, expert in Russian literature; Boris Yakobi, physicist and inventor of modern electrodeposition; Alexander Fersman, a major Russian and Soviet mineralogist; Alexander Lyapunov, originator of the theory of the shapes of heavenly bodies; Vasili Petrov, the first Russian electrical engineer; Nikolai Marr, the philologist; Vladimir Vernadsky, our great geologist and geochemist, who founded the modern theory of the biosphere, the noosphere; here Ivan Pavlov lived, and here he



Georgi Knyazev.

died in 1936. Each of the names represents a whole department of science. From over a century and a half of history these 27 names were chosen, and how many more splendid Russian and Soviet scientists lived here!

It was in this house, which has in a sense become a symbol of Russian science, that Georgi Knyazev, director of the USSR Academy of Sciences Archives, was living when the war broke out.

He could have inhabited a different house and there lived out his allotted years, writing works on the history of the Academy of Sciences, or on archive matters, but the fact that he resided in this house all through the blockade, and here kept up his diary—"Half a Century in the Life of an Average Russian Intellectual"—acquires unexpected significance.

A person often gets the feeling that if he had lived in a different house, with a different view from the windows, he would have been a somewhat different person and his life might, possibly, have taken a different turn. Who knows, perhaps this is not a mere flight of fancy?

Georgi Knyazev's legs were semi-paralysed, and he travelled in a wheelchair to work and back. It was rare that he went further afield. The archives of the Academy of Sciences were right there on the embankment, beyond the University, in the Academy building, about 800 metres from his home. This small stretch along the embankment was virtually Georgi Knyazev's basic journey of the entire blockade, the fraction, the tiny fraction of the city he was in a position to observe, that minuscule radius on which turned the whole of his war—the blockade, the shelling, the bombing, hunger, evacuation.

At first glance it was a very limited area, but then what did we see, we, who were sitting in those same months in the trenches on the Lenin-

grad Front near Pulkovo, or Pushkin, or at Sinyavin? Our trench, our sector, also half a kilometre in length, "our" Fritzes, the minefields, a scrap of land, and behind us, the dug-out of the battalion command post, a couple of our pillboxes, and way off in the distance the unsmoking silhouette of the city. Our own minuscule radius, where our own Great Patriotic War was taking place, where people were dying, firing, advancing, where everything was happening.

Knyazev wrote:

"23.6.41. Day 2 of the war. So I haven't heard the details of the opening up of Timur's tomb. The events of the war have overshadowed the news of the archeological excavations in Samarkand.

"How everything on earth is repeated! In the fourteenth century Timur, or Tamerlane, conquered India, from the Indus to the Ganges, and also Persia, Syria, Turkey and southern Russia.

"And now once again, but far outdoing Timur the Lame—there is that outrageous Hitler, who has brought so much suffering to his own people, and to all other peoples, both the enslaved and humiliated and those who are fighting against his diabolical regime.

"The first wounded have been brought into Leningrad. The new Mannerheim Line beyond Vyborg has been pierced by our units in several places, according to Chernikov. Several thousand German paratroopers have also been wiped out.

"So ends the second day of the great patriotic war.*

"I'm tired after the day's events. The blood's throbbing in my head, and there's a sound like propellers whirring in my ears all the time."

This roar of propellers, anticipated at that time, was to haunt Knyazev for a long while—until the first big air raid on Leningrad in the early days of September. Then that nervous rumble in his head stopped, replaced by the very real roaring of planes and ear-rending explosions, to which people soon became accustomed.

"25.6.41. Day 4 ... This morning, when white strips of paper were being pasted across all the windows, a woman turned up and said that in their office they'd had an order to paste black, not white strips on the windows... Nevertheless, in the entire city, all the windows are criss-crossed with white strips of paper.

"We study the situation at the front on the map. Fierce, terrible battles are going on. We are most of all worried about whether the Germans will cut off the Kirov (Murmansk) railway. There are especially bitter battles in the vicinity of Kandalaksha.

* Note that Georgi Knyazev foresaw the name under which that war would go down in our history—The Great Patriotic War (*This and other notes are made by the authors.*)

"At work I had talks with representatives of special archive repositories. We decided that in a number of cases we would not transfer the most valuable material into damp basements liable to flooding..."

What have you got beneath your windows, or on your way to work—birch trees, limes, a river, cottages, blocks of flats? Georgi Knyazev had sphinxes. As if it were specially arranged because he was a historian. And also because he collected and recorded facts about the progress or regress of humankind. They were always before his eyes, those ancient sphinxes. So there was someone with whom he could talk on the way to the Archives or on his way home about the centuries and millennia of mankind's bloody history...

They lie there, carved in pink stone, the colour of the granite embankments, with human faces and the paws of beasts, facing each other, and the old cursive Cyrillic script announces, "These sphinxes from ancient Thebes, in Egypt, were brought to the city of St Peter in 1832". Their presence here was apt for in their lifetime they had witnessed quite a bit of the history of what Knyazev calls, "the rises and falls of humanity along the path of progress".

Knyazev's notes from his early years had been devoted—constantly, for a long time—to a single question: where was mankind, the human race, heading? Now they were the notes of a Leningrader who did not yet know what fate had in store for the city and its inhabitants in the next few months, but who in the very first days of the war realised that "we shall have to go through a great deal—that's clear".

"Two bronze lampposts that stood by the sphinxes have been dismantled and removed. The sphinxes are still in place... Today I gazed at them with deep emotion... But I was not able to compose any poetry.

"All the same, I'm writing these notes. What for? I can't help writing them. But I'm not trying to encompass the unencompassable.

"On my small radius"—that is the theme of my notes. Who am I writing them for? For you, my distant friend, member of the future communist society, to whom war will be inherently loathsome, as repugnant as is to us anthropophagy—cannibalism... And after all, our ancestors devoured one another with relish! I believe, and in this I am an incorrigible dreamer, that the time will come when there will be no more war on earth.

"That is why I keep on making these notes. I'm not scared of the thought that they might be destroyed, burnt at some terrible moment in a possible air raid on our city, any more than I'm frightened of the fact that I might myself be killed.

"And if this should reach you, my distant friend, perhaps in the form of scraps of scorched pages, you will experience with me the stuff of life, the emotions and worries of your unfortunate forerunner, who was fated to live in the 'prehistoric' epoch, but at the dawn of real human history. In the official papers that will have survived, you will find material for historical research, in my notes you will feel the pulse-beat of

the life of one small individual who on his small radius lived through a long, unencompassable and complex life of tragedy and contradictions.

"In our courtyard, in the garden, there's a meeting of the house residents. My wife's there too. Soon she'll be back, and will tell me what happened there.

"10.30. Heard the news on the radio. Turkey has declared its neutrality. From the very start of the great patriotic war people all over the Soviet country are rising in anger to meet the German threat.

"The peoples of Europe must surely rise in rebellion!

"26.6.41. Day 5. Had a peaceful night's sleep. No air raid alarms. That meant noises in my ears. Interesting that this illusion is not specific to myself but that others have observed the same thing.

"A normal working day at the Archives. I took a party of students round and gave them a lecture, feeling greatly inspired.

"In the evening we read the rules of behaviour and measures to be taken during an air alert. M. F. has been to the dispensary. I sorted out stocks of medicaments for use in the event of burns or wounds."

The centuries and even millennia explored by the mind and imagination of such an erudite historian as Knyazev did not prevent his remaining "an average Russian intellectual of his time". Later on we shall become convinced (and these notes give evidence of this) that the days, the weeks and the months of life in blockaded Leningrad were equal to many decades in the life of a human being. He was to do so much thinking, to undergo so many experiences that the whole of his previous life would seem no more than a preparatory class.

"28.6.41. Saturday. Day 7. A terrible, nerve-racking day. I. L.* contributed to the excess tension. Affected by the announcement of the mortal danger hanging over us, and the news of the evacuation of Leningrad children, she drew what in my view is a gloomy conclusion about the situation at the front. What caused her anxiety is the penetration by tank units of the disposition of our troops on the Minsk and other sectors of the front. Others were immediately infected by this mood, especially those who had come to work tired out by a night of futile duty in the main Academy of Sciences' building. I did everything I could to raise spirits. I pointed out to I. L. that she had flouted my orders by taking Svikul off duty in the Archives in the evening and directing her to the main building. In the words of the staff members who had been on duty there, they had been 'guarding the chairs in the President's office', while the Archives had been left without any guard. In the morning all the staff took sand up to the attic floor."

* There are many names we have not published in full, as assessments of people may have been fortuitous, a result of the unclarity of a situation at the moment.

Yura Ryabinkin, 1937.



Рыбинский журнал

2 Ленинград
ч. 3 ~~из~~ 1943
9. 34 № 2.

250	35	162	2.2
30	15	25	2.0
30	15		5.0
250	15		1.0
10	-		1.0
20	2.2		2.0
15		15	2.0
15		15	-
2		2	-

Дневник.

1941 год

22 июня

Всю ночь мне не давало спать на
кае-то мушкетерство за окном. Когда,
наконец, к утру еще немного ^я -
тихо, поджидая зари. Сейчас в
ленинграде стоят лунные светлые
короткие ночи. Но когда я встала
ну в окно, я увидела, что ^я хо-
дит несколько проекторов
все-таки я заснул. Проснулся я
в одиннадцать и часу дня вернее
утра. Наскоро оделся, умылся, поел
и пошел в сад дворняжников. В
это лето я решила получить ква-
лификацию по шахматам. Как-никак
я все-таки часто даже у пре-
тесной Катерины
Войска на улице, я заметил что-то
особенное у ворот нашего дома я
увидел дворняжки с противотанковой и
красной повязкой на руке. У всех по-
старелся было то же самое. Инди-
шанеры были с противотанковой, и
даже на всех перекрестках говори-
ло радио. Что-то такое подсказало мне
что по городу все-таки устроена ве-
стительская
Придя во двор, я заметил только
двух шахматистов. Вероятно, были
очень рано. Действительно, в это
позднее, пришлось еще несколько часов
всего.
Расставляя шахматы на доске я
увидел, что-то новое обр-
тывшись. Я заметил कुछ ребят
статных, вокруг одного небольшого
парнишки. Я прислушался и
заметил
Вчера в 4 часа ночи германские
бейбардировщики совершили на-
лет на Киев. Митинг, Севастополь
и еще куда-то - с жаром говори-
ли парни. Я полотно по радио выс-
пал. М. У нас война с Германией

From Yura Ryabinkin's diary: "22nd June 1941. Some buzzing
or other outside kept me awake all night..."

The notes made during those months and days, especially the daily notes, differ from reminiscences at a distance of thirty years. They are distinguished, in particular, by the fact that the diarist had no knowledge of the future. He is presented with his hopes, which were not all justified and were thus forgotten, with his suppositions which proved illusory... So Knyazev was convinced that the peoples of Europe would rise, and that the authorities had calculated everything in advance...

Today the blockade is seen as a tragic page in a *victorious* war. The memory has lost many of the details of that life or has heightened them in its own way, but in selecting facts and experiences, magnifying and sharpening them, it sometimes loses certain shadings, certain nuances and changes of heart.

In the stories told by Leningraders—from what they remember, and how—one feature of the blockade memory is very noticeable: people are there (in the siege) and here (in our time) simultaneously. The relentless memory, hiding nothing, seems to wipe out the boundaries of time. (That is why, incidentally, the stories told from memory by survivors fit in so naturally and smoothly with the documents and diaries.)

Yevgenia Ravidel, a woman with a precise and observant mind, gave us a particularly apt description of that double (or twofold) vision which is so characteristic of the blockade memory:

“When I look back from here, I have the sensation that all the time I am standing by an open grave, but when I am entirely transported back there, I clearly recall that apart from everything else we also felt curiosity about all that awaited us, and a kind of elation in the expectation of something extraordinary...”

In the diary entries of *T. V. Ryabinina* we see the same astonishment at unexpected developments, at the complexities of human emotions and behaviour:

“Then we learnt that there was no way out of the city, that we were surrounded in a tight ring. But there was no panic, no wish to break out. As far as I was concerned, I was also full of silly childish curiosity. I wanted to see everything, experience everything. My subsequent fate fully satisfied that wish. I saw and experienced enough.”

Yes, diary material differs, and is bound to differ, from those recordings of stories recounted by blockade survivors thirty years later, which comprised the first part of *A Book of the Blockade*.

But what is this difference, what does it consist in? In adding the diary part of the book we are, in a way, checking and rechecking that first part. Would the truth of the reminiscences stand the test of the diary documents?

There had been doubts, and they were expressed to us: after all, that was thirty years ago! How far can you trust reminiscences of that kind?

But the reminiscences that made up the first part of the book have already undergone a kind of initial test. The results were expressed in letters received from blockade survivors whom we had not managed to meet and talk with. The response was virtually unanimous—yes, that's how it was in my case, that's exactly what happened to us! And then came accounts of their own experiences, details, confirmation.

The diaries also confirm them—they don't refute or deny the truth of reminiscences. That memory is a special thing. Time, of course, has had its effect, as it does on the mountain rocks. The soft ones are eroded and crumble, while the hard ones stand out bare on the surface. The very strongest come to prominence. But now, as we read the diaries, we get down to the bedrock, to the totally undisturbed authenticity of that life...

Yura Ryabinkin introduced himself in his diary with a brief autobiography.

"AUTOBIOGRAPHY"

"I was born in Leningrad on the 2nd day of September 1925.

"I live with my mother, my sister and my aunt.

"My mother works at the regional committee of the industrial building union centre. She is head of the library stocks, and has been a member of the Communist Party since 1927. My aunt's a doctor, and is now at the front. My sister is eight years old. Dad left us in 1933, married someone else and went to Karelia. We heard he was exiled to Ufa in 1937.

"Until I was seven I was brought up at my aunt's place in the country.

"In 1933 I started school, and I've just finished the eighth grade and am going up into the ninth.

"In 1938/39 I attended a Seafarers' Club in Kuibyshev district, then took a practical course in the summer at Strelnya, and got a Young Seafarers' badge. Apart from that, in addition to school, I attended a history-study circle at the Young Pioneers' Palace for almost three years. I wrote essays on such subjects as Bagration, Suvorov, etc. For my studies I have a 'good' mark.

Y. Ryabinkin"

So he was not yet 16, he lived in the centre, in Third of July Street (earlier it had been called Sadovaya St., and now it has its old name back). He describes the day the war started with a wealth of detail, as does everyone else. This day was stamped in the memory of each Leningrader. Not only what happened after the news of war was announced—memory also snatched up all the preceding hours, illuminating them with the minutest detail.

"22nd June 1941. Some buzzing or other outside kept me awake all night. By the time it finally quietened down a bit towards morning, the sun had already risen. The nights in Leningrad now are moonlit, clear and short. But when I looked out of the window I saw several search-lights moving across the sky. All the same I fell asleep. When I woke up it was after 10 o'clock in the day, or rather, in the morning. I dressed quickly, washed and had something to eat, then set out for the park of the Pioneer Palace. This summer I had decided to get a chess qualification. Somehow or other I often defeat even first-class players.

"As I went out into the street I noticed something unusual. At the gateway to our house I saw the yardkeeper with a gas mask and wearing a red armband. There was the same sight at the entrances to all the houses. The militiamen were also carrying gas masks and something was coming over the loudspeakers at every crossroads. I gathered that the city was in a state of emergency.

"In the Pioneer Palace I found only two chessplayers. It must've been too early. True enough, somewhat later a few more turned up.

"As I was setting out the pieces on the board I heard something new. I turned round and saw a crowd of youngsters huddling round a small boy. I listened and ... I froze in horror...

" 'Yesterday at 4 a.m. German bombers raided Kiev, Zhitomir, Sevastopol and somewhere else,' the boy said with animation. 'Molotov spoke over the radio. Now we're at war with Germany!'

"I was startled out of my wits, you know. What news! And I hadn't even an inkling of such a thing. Germany! Germany had gone to war against us! That was why they were all carrying gas masks.

"My head was spinning. I just couldn't think straight. I played three games. Oddly enough, I won all three, and drifted off home.

"In the street I stopped and listened to Molotov on the radio.

"When I got home, there was only Mum there. She already knew what had happened.

"After dinner, I went out to walk about the streets. Everywhere there was a feeling of tension. The entire stuffy, dusty atmosphere of the city was filled with it. As I was nearing home again, I queued for a paper. The papers hadn't yet arrived, but the queue was enormous. Interesting talk ran through the queue, jokes on international themes, sceptical remarks.

" 'Suppose Germany and Britain make peace and the two of them turn on us together?'

" 'We'll bomb everything, not like it was in Finland—housing areas, too. Let the proletariat speak out, understand what it's getting itself into.'

" 'Did you hear that a German plane's been brought down near Olgino?'

" 'Just fancy it getting that far!'

" 'Yes, the next thing we'll see is a real bombing raid. Maybe three hundred planes over Leningrad...'

" 'That may well happen. Everything in its time.'

"I'd been queuing for about two hours and was ready to leave when they announced that there wouldn't be any newspapers. They said there

would be some kind of an official bulletin instead, although no one had any idea when. After another half hour I finally went back home. Later, Nina, our housekeeper, went for the paper.

"The day is coming to an end. The clock says half-past eleven. A really serious battle is beginning, a clash between two antagonistic forces—socialism and fascism! The wellbeing of all mankind depends on the outcome of this historic struggle."

Extracts from Yura's diary were published in 1970, in the Leningrad newspaper *Smena*. We were given a copy of that diary by Alla Belyakova, former editor of the paper. The diary had been saved and preserved by R. I. Trifonova, a nurse.

Anyone who has had anything to do with Yura Ryabinkin's diary unerringly senses the power and talent of this document—even though it begins in quite an ordinary way. Like Georgi Knyazev, Yura is doing his duty, trying in some way to help the adults, the city. The war, the blockade was not yet confronting him with serious problems, he has no need to fight...

It is worth looking deeper into this ordinariness. For all the boyishness of Yura's notes, and despite the fact that the war had only just started, there is no fear in the diary. There's a calm, efficient attitude, there is the work about which Yura slightly shows off. But as we read on, we become clearly aware of how rapidly he matures.

"26th June. Today I went to the Pioneer Palace as soon as I got up. From there I went with the lads to do construction work by Kazan Cathedral. I worked from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. with an hour lunch break. Now I have corns and splinters on both hands. I dragged planks about, dug the earth, sawed and chopped—had to do something of everything. Towards the end my hands were so painful I couldn't saw any more. In the lunch break I started reading Turgenev. Spent the evening at home. Mum came home from her duty watch early—her replacement had turned up. Well, I can't write any more, there's no time, I must go to the Palace.

"28th June. Today I worked at the Pioneer Palace again, helping to build bomb shelters. It's hellish work. We became stonemasons this time. I've bashed my hands about with a hammer—they're all bruised now. But they let us off early—at 3 p.m. It turns out that we've worked four and a half hours, but how we worked!

"From the Palace I went home to Mum. She's worried, walks about looking blue, and depressed. The possibility of chemical warfare's come up, and they're starting to evacuate people. I took five roubles and went to the canteen. Then I came home. A woman called to register all children under 13. She registered Ira. The house superintendent told Nina to do duty at the entrance from 9.30 to 3. He said besides that if there's an air raid alarm we have to run to Khamadulin's on the ground floor. But all the same, it's quite dangerous there. There's no protection against

high-explosive bombs, or an air shock wave either. The wave would flatten the house, and the debris would bury us in the cellar. There's even less chance of protection against chemical bombs.

"29th June. I worked building bomb shelters at the Pioneer Palace. Before that I went to Lassalles Square to load sand. But there wasn't all that much work to do there. The boys modelled Hitler's ugly mug in the sand and started whacking it with spades. I joined in, too. At the Pioneer Palace I was heaving bricks and sand about again. I left the Palace at 6 p.m. When I got home there was a surprise waiting for me.

"I had only got as far as the door when Ira came running up to me, shouting: 'Look what Mum's bought me! And she hasn't bought any for you! Not for you!' I went into the dining room. On the sofa were a reefer jacket and a doll bought for Ira. On the table were Ira's new boots.

"Mum pushed some note or other into my hands, and I mechanically opened it. It was an application to the military enlistment office for Mum and me to be accepted in the Red Army as volunteers.

"It turned out that in the morning Mum had been at a Party meeting in her office and all the Party members had decided to volunteer for the Red Army. The first thing I felt was a sort of pride, then a little fear, but finally the first overpowered the second.

"In the evening Mum and I went to the owner of one of the houses at Siverskaya station, near Leningrad. Mum had decided to send Nina and Ira there if we went to the front. There they reached some kind of agreement.

"The same evening I went—oh-ho-ho! —to the barber's. It's probably about two months since I had my hair cut.

"30th June. I arrived at the Pioneer Palace to find the lads playing billiards. We played for about half an hour. Then we went to work on the bomb shelter. Again I lugged sand from the garden. We weren't released until 7 o'clock. I went to my mother's workplace. There was some more news there—they probably wouldn't take me in the army. I was too young, and then I suffered from pleurisy. Because I'm feeling under the weather, the pleurisy's making itself felt, they'll probably release me from work at the Palace and send me to a children's camp.

"We've lost touch with Tina.* She can't come here, as she's registered in Shlisselburg, and it's dangerous for us to go to her. At 9 o'clock I went to see David Finkelstein. He doesn't work anywhere and has lots of spare time. His little brother's being sent off to Malaya Vishera the day after tomorrow. I told him how things were going at the Palace. He decided to come there to work, too. I left him at about 11 p.m."

The third eyewitness in this part of the book is Lydia Okhapkina. She was then 28. On June 22, 1941, she intended to return to their country cottage, where she was spending the summer with the children.

* Tina—Valentina Ivanovna, Yura's aunt, his mother's sister.

Her husband, Vasili, was away on a business trip, and her nephew and Shura Samsonov, a relative of her husband's, came to see her off.

"Everything being ready for the trip, I was breast-feeding my daughter, who was five months old. Suddenly I heard on the radio: 'Attention, attention!' Then Molotov began speaking. I said we couldn't go to the country, we had to stay and wait for my husband. I wasn't at all scared, recalling the Finnish war, which hadn't been in the least frightening, at any rate, not for me, or for Leningrad. I sent Olya, my husband's sister, and my nephew to the shop to get something for dinner. After feeding the baby, I took her in my arms and we went outdoors with Shura. On the way he tried to reassure me by saying that the war would not last long, but all the same he and my husband would have to go and fight."

One point of clarification. Lydia Okhapkina's notes differ from those of Yura and Knyazev, in that they are not a diary but notes made somewhat after the events they describe.

"I began them precisely on Victory Day. People were rejoicing, but everything came flooding back to me, and I sat down to write. I was writing especially for my husband and my son. My husband had fought outside the 'ring', and my son didn't remember anything at all. I swore I would write only the truth. Only the truth! In a month I had written it all down. But then, during the blockade, other things took the heart out of me, I was in no state at all to do it..."—this is the story of Lydia Okhapkina's notes, as she herself explains it.

"On 26.6.41 my husband arrived back. They started evacuating some of the factory equipment, and people. It was already difficult to get train tickets. They were planning to take all children of nursery school and school age to other towns, as Leningrad would be in danger."

The rest of the notes have no dates on them.

"My husband and I decided we'd send our son with the nursery school. I'd stay with our daughter, and with only her to look after it will be easier for me to dash to the bomb shelter when an alarm goes. He also thinks that the war will last through the summer and will be over by winter."

Lydia Okhapkina lived in a two-storey wooden house beyond the Volkovo Cemetery.

"On 28th June we sent off our son. Poor child, he was only five. I got his clothes ready, marked everything, and embroidered his first name and surname on them all.

"As I dressed him that morning, I wondered when I would next have the chance to dress him. And suddenly I was seized with alarm and agitation about when I'd ever see him again, and whether he might be lost altogether. I was very upset and nervous, and told my husband about it, and as I looked round at him I saw tears rolling down his cheeks.

"On 30th June Vasya went away. Before he left he told me he was being sent to work as a field engineer (he was a professional engineer) and not to the front, where the battles were raging—so I wouldn't worry. It was true and untrue. They sent him somewhere near Smolensk, and he fell into German encirclement. They wandered about for a long time, hiding in the forest, but in the end managed to break through somehow. But then neither he nor I knew anything of that.

"...The bombing lasted 20-30 minutes as a rule, but sometimes it went on for a couple of hours. I would go pale and tremble all over with fear. There would be a ringing in my ears and they would seem about to burst. My legs refused to obey me, and sometimes I felt I just couldn't move. But I had to pick up my little daughter and run to the shelter."

Thus began the chronicle of a mother's suffering.

Half starved, and later starving, this woman saved her children. She saved them once, twice, a hundred times, displaying ingenuity, resourcefulness and desperate courage.

"I SHALL NEVER LEAVE THE CITY"

Archives and home. Both these points in Knyazev's life underwent changes. The war transformed what might seem to have been the most stable, lasting, immutable pillars of life. Georgi Knyazev tirelessly observed this, comparing and making sense of these changes. One might have thought he was preparing for a long recording, or a thousand-page narrative—so detailed is the beginning of his diary. And strange as it may seem, he succeeded in completing his narrative, whereas many diaries begun in a hurry, with brief entries, with the idea that later on there would be more detail added, were broken off for various reasons.

"1.7.41. Day 10 of the war. Academician Pavlovsky, handing me a manuscript he had in his possession, said: 'Keep it safe if you can. The situation's very serious.'

"Later in the day came the head of the Archives of the IRLI*. We con-

* Institute of Russian Literature of the USSR Academy of Sciences (the Pushkin House).

ferred for a long time on the question of the proper preservation here, in Leningrad, of priceless materials—manuscripts of Pushkin, Lomonosov, Lermontov, Turgenev, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy and others. Gorodetsky looks absolutely awful. He can't sleep at night. 'What a responsibility you and I bear!' he said.

"Yes, we do bear a tremendous responsibility (it is not a matter of legal, administrative or official responsibility), a moral responsibility to posterity.

"2.7.41. Day 11. The building of the archival administration, in Red Fleet Square, which has seen so much in its time, is now passing through another phase in its history. On the staircase which once heard the rap of Guards Officer Lermontov's sabre, up and down which soldiers rushed in a flurry on the night of 15th December 1825 as they searched the building after the abortive rising in Senate Square—soldiers with tallow candles fixed on the end of their bayonets—there now hangs, on the right-hand side, a length of rail on a thick cord and side by side with it a metal rod—a beater. This is for use in the event of a gas alarm. It was dark on the upper landing where blue lamps were burning. I walked along the corridor, which was in almost total darkness, and had the feeling that I was in something akin to a Meyerhold production.

"The IRLI repository made a dreadful impression on me. I did not recognise the workrooms. Everything was in a state of chaos. In the first one, a through room, behind a statue of Alexander Veselovsky, stood two large barrels of water, one of which was already leaking; boxes of sand and spades were all over the place; a fire hose stretched along the corridor. Outside the Pushkin room were boxes for archival material, some empty, some full. I had to do them justice—Pushkin's manuscripts were packed perfectly... But there was a lot of fuss and agitation. Right there, by the boxes, one of the staff was dictating to a typist an article about fascism. Someone else was writing out a list of what had to be packed in the boxes. Underfoot was sand and stains of water from the hose running across the floor, evidently left there for drying or laid there for some precautionary purpose. Everywhere, both in the working areas of the Archives and on the Museum staircases there were crowds of people carrying sandbags... Standing right up against the doors into the reading room were the busts of two writers, taken from somewhere or other in a hurry and left there on the floor. Gorodetsky, who is in charge, has done a great deal to preserve the material, but he has overdone it. Uspenskaya, the writer's daughter, and a member of the staff at the Literary Archives, said to me, indicating the general disorder: 'I think we've tried a bit too hard...'

"Gorodetsky himself is absolutely exhausted. He hasn't slept for three or four nights. He has been in the Archives all the time, worrying, doing battle with the administration. The result is that his nerves are shattered. 'I'm definitely quitting just as soon as I've done my duty. Nothing on earth would make me stay here in charge of the Archives. They don't understand me and the administration ticks me off for taking too much trouble over the archival material, for being too insistent...'

"The monument to Peter the Great is being sandbagged.

"In the Rumyantsev Garden they've finished digging trenches or dug-outs.

"The sphinxes are still in place. They're oblivious to everything, as ever!

"I can't possibly make out whether the noise is in my ears or I'm really hearing the roar of propellers. It's quiet, a sinister hush... But the day will come when that silence is broken by a terrible crackling. Fires will start. Huge buildings will collapse in ruins under the rain of high-explosive bombs. There will be wounded... Dead... People out of their minds... Others trapped alive under debris. We shall have to go through all that and perhaps in the very near future. If you kept thinking about it all the time, you'd inevitably go crazy; at best you'd lose your capacity for living, become a useless character. I hope that won't happen to me. I have sufficient will to live.

"3.7.41. Day 12. Those who listened to Stalin's speech say that reception was very bad and they couldn't make out many places at all. My driver who heard it remarked that the accent was too pronounced and that there were pauses when you could hear the gurgling of water being poured into a glass.

"Academician S. I. Vavilov, with whom I have had a talk, takes a very sober view of things. As regards Leningrad he is calm. The two of us discussed a host of questions connected with our work on the history of the Academy of Sciences and other subjects. We shall continue the work of the commission on the Academy's history.

"A battle to the death... In retreat, leave nothing to the enemy—that was the message of Stalin's speech.

"5.7.41. Day 14. My wife spent the entire morning clearing out the attic floor and taking planks and all kinds of junk out into the courtyard. How many useless articles have been thrown out of attics, which have been accumulating rubbish for over a century! (Our house underwent major reconstruction six years before the first Patriotic War, that is, in 1806.) We don't seem to be able to organise an adequate, effective fire watch on our No. 3 staircase.

"...What do I, a humanist, dream of now? About this (see illustration cut from a newspaper): 'In response to the threat of a German invasion the people of London have erected a gallows by the ruins of a bombed house, with a notice saying: "Ready for Hitler".'

"We shouldn't hang him straightaway, but first put him on trial. Summon representatives of every country ravaged by Hitler—men and women from places that have suffered particularly—as members of the jury. Gather documents and examples from the abundant 'material evidence' of the savage cruelty of Hitler and his henchmen. Use these 'relics' to create a 'museum of horrors and suffering' for the edification of posterity, to show people of the future the terrifying atrocities perpetrated by the bestial invaders. Bring together in this museum Hitler's forerunners, too—international murderers and plunderers, successful and unsuccessful, such as Napoleon, Wilhelm, Tamerlane and Attila, and many other notorious figures in the so-called world history of mankind, or rather the history of pre-human society... Or, perhaps, not even among

the gang of 'greats', but simply in the ranks of such filthy wretches as Cain, Herod and Judas there's a place for Hitler, who is held in contempt by the whole world. A name with a stench."

The list of neighbours quoted by Georgi Knyazev, on which, in epic manner, the names of outstanding scholars (Arabist Krachkovsky, Sino-logist Alexeyev) rub shoulders with people known only in their narrow family circle (widows and relatives of academicians, pensioners, housewives, schoolchildren—all human beings equal in the face of the oncoming tragedy), and the details of what was going on at the Archives of the Institute of Literature—both show the author's understanding that each and every event then taking place acquired historical dimensions. It was a valuable feeling, natural in an author of historical works, but unfortunately not terribly widespread. The details of life, of the daily round, even important events, are not now recorded, not chronicled as they used to be, say, in the nineteenth century. For example, we have a far better idea of the details, events, situation, reading interests, tastes, furniture, food, costumes, etc. of the 1820s in Russia than we have of all these things in the 1920s. It is as though we have transferred the duties of the chronicler, the annalist, to newspapers, to the cinema and to journalism. But the hopes placed in these often remain unfulfilled. Not one recollection of the blockade has retained the texts of notices of sale, exchange or services, which were dotted about all over the city. We know there were a lot of them, that some were most unusual, most typical of the times, but the actual wording of the notices is forgotten. We did not come across any details of the blockade market or the first nazi war prisoners who were led through the city streets. That is why the details of life so carefully entered in his diary by Georgi Knyazev are so precious.

"7.7.41. Day 16. A tense day. There were two air raid warnings, though we didn't hear any gunfire. Yesterday, people say, several lone enemy planes appeared over the city, but the alarm was not sounded. Everyone says that an enemy plane has been shot down over the outskirts of Lenin-grad and that it crashed and went up in flames.

"St Isaac's Cathedral with its magnificent gilded dome, visible for many tens of kilometres around like a 100-metre-high beacon, is losing its striking appearance. The gilded main cupola and the smaller ones, which are also gilded, are being covered with some sort of grey stuff.

"The Bronze Horseman has not yet been protected by sandbags, nor have the sphinxes. But the sculpture done by Rastrelli of Peter the Great, which normally stands in front of the Engineers' Fort and bears the inscription 'To a great-grandfather from a great-grandson' has been removed. There's just the empty pedestal.

"The day before yesterday the evacuation of children began. Now they're envisaging not only the evacuation of children but also of adults, who may accompany their children.

"All the main treasures of the Hermitage have been evacuated to an unknown destination. Today Academician S. I. Vavilov came to see me. We decided to put the most valuable of our archive treasures onto the second Hermitage evacuation train. We have already handed some of

them over—the mosaic portraits of Peter done by Lomonosov, the 18th century plans of St Petersburg (by Leblond and Makhayev) and the gilded ark in which the Order of Catherine the Great, written in her own hand, has been preserved at the Academy of Sciences.

“No words can describe what I felt when they took off the wall the mosaic portrait of Peter the Great, the founder of the Academy of Sciences, which I had looked after with such love and concern; when they took away the gilded ark, the skilful work of an 18th century master; when the repository to which I had given so much of my energy and affection has been ravaged, stripped bare. The Hermitage workers carefully removed the portrait from the wall and carried it out to the waiting car. Frankly speaking, I accompanied them in a state of agitation. I was fully aware that I would never see these things again. I had built up to the best of my abilities an archive and museum of the Academy of Sciences. But the war has thrown things into disorder and laid bare the places where these monuments of the great Russian culture had been preserved with such care.

“At first we had spoken of a reliable storage in the city, but now, in view of the developments at the front, we are concerned to see that they are evacuated. I feel that evacuation together with the Hermitage will be safer... But my heart aches. I came home quite drained.

“13.7.41. Day 22. The car didn't come, and I waited for four hours in vain, sitting beneath the column of our academic building. Within a distance of a few hundred metres (less than a kilometre), along my radius, there lay before me the Neva, the bridge and the sphinxes, the Academy of Arts, St Isaac's Cathedral, the Admiralty spire, the Peter the Great monument (hidden behind a plank casing), the old Senate building, and the old-world houses along the embankment. In the distance I could see the Winter Palace, right by the bridge, the former Rumyantsev house with its famous museum, the former English Embankment and to the west the New Admiralty. On the right bank of the Neva I could clearly discern the Baltic Works, the Mining Institute, the Marine Training College, the former Kiev hostelry, the old-fashioned straight lines of Vasilievsky Island, ships at the moorings, and tall, powerful cranes on the banks where the Neva skirts the spit of Vasilievsky Island. This is my city, whose beauty was admired from the former Nikolayevsky Bridge by Dostoyevsky. There is that Senate Square with a view on the pointed silhouette of Vasilievsky Island, with the Academy of Sciences and the Pushkin House, as extolled by Blok. That proud monument to Peter the Great, the Bronze Horseman, and the Neva were hymned by Pushkin. Those sphinxes I see before me have stirred the hearts of many poets, artists, and scientists as they passed by them. A splendid city! Surely it is not at risk of being occupied by the enemy? No, no, no!

“For four hours I admired the wonderful panorama of our native city. I shall never leave the city. If the worst happens, I would rather die here on the embankment, or in the waters of the deep Neva... But our city, and I firmly believe this, will not fall into enemy hands!

“15.7.41. Day 24. Today we sent off from the Archives to the Hermitage

Меняю на продукты:

1. Золотые запонки.
2. Отрез на юбку (темносиняя шерсть)
3. Мужские ботинки: желтые №40 и лакированные №41
4. Чайник, типа самовара-кипятится узлом.
5. Фото-аппарат „ФЭД“ с увеличителем.
6. Дрель

Здесь же продается швейная машинка, 72-й класс, фирмы „Зингер“, барометр и качалка.

Обращайтесь по адресу:

Ул. Дзержинская д. 17 кв. 9/1. Гладкова
с 11 ч. до 4 ч. дня.

“Ready to barter for food: I. A pair of gold cuff links.

2. A skirt length of dark blue woollen cloth.

3. Men's shoes: yellow leather, size 40; patterned leather, size 41. 4. A coal-heated urn.

5. A camera with a photographic enlarger.

6. A drill. Also on sale is a Zinger sewing-machine, 72 class, a barometer and a rocking-chair. Address: Dzerzhinsky Street, 17, apt. 31, Gladkova. Call in from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

tage our most precious treasures of all—the manuscripts of Lomonosov and Kepler, the drawings of the Kunst-kammer, etc. They will be taken with the Hermitage's second train to a reliable place. Which place? We don't know.

“Altogether we packed 30 boxes. We've taken every precaution against dampness and penetration by dust (ruberoid, cellophane, oilcloth, folders and paper). All of us in the Archives have been working flat out for two weeks. We've made an inventory of all the materials, making separate lists for each box. The boxes were wired round and sealed.

“I followed the lorry with the boxes as far as the embankment. It was like seeing off someone near and dear to you—a son, a daughter, a wife... I watched for a long time as the lorry slowly (I had asked the driver to go carefully) drove across the Palace Bridge... Orphaned, I returned to the Archives...

“They're introducing food ration cards. We have to make lists by 10 a.m. tomorrow. It's being done very hurriedly. The people themselves only welcome this new or, rather, old, ‘innovation’.

“All guidebooks and maps of Leningrad and St Petersburg are to be handed in to the special department.

"16 and 17.7.41. Days 25 and 26... There are rumours going around that we're in a state of extreme disarray and disorganisation. This appals me. What makes the Germans frightening? Precisely their extraordinary degree of organisation, their precise, coordinated actions...

"Things are not going well with the evacuated children. Mothers are going off to bring their children back. I let one of our typists off—T.K. Orbeli—to go to Borovichi and fetch her nine- and twelve-year-old daughters."

THE FIRST ROUND OF CHILDREN'S EVACUATION

We recorded quite a few stories about the evacuation of children—the first and subsequent times. Georgi Knyazev conscientiously emphasised that his radius of observation was a small one. Beyond its limits he went with caution, in order not to be led astray by rumours. He knew from the First World War how widespread these were in difficult times. There's a warning about that, incidentally, from the people's own experience: "In hunger folk die, in war folk lie."

Where it is both possible and appropriate we shall extend the little radius of Georgi Knyazev with the aid of additional documents—diaries, reminiscences and memories of other Leningraders.

Maria Motovskaya was, in fact, involved in the evacuation of children at that time. She remembers the event in all its detail. No longer a young woman, it still gives her great pain to think that everything turned out as it did...

"Now we realise that we were travelling towards the Germans, but at the time nobody knew that. Why should we have? It was a good area, a remote area. I was entrusted by the district executive committee with the job of getting the children to Novgorod region, to be precise, to Demyansk. And we travelled straight there. I had two cars and one lorry. There were two responsible comrades to help me, and off we went."

"What was your job at the time?"

"I was head of the education department of the Kirov district and a member of the executive committee. That was why I was sent with the children. I had a very good deputy, Anatoly Stadorsky, who had to see us off, while I had to go and fix the children up when they reached their destination. And so I ... I don't know whether there's any point in speaking of this?"

"Please go on."

"It happened like this. We arrived there... Need I tell you that Demyansk had, as they say, roused the entire district to turn out to welcome the children from Leningrad... We had already decided where we would have each school quartered and all that... But within a few days we had an order to re-evacuate the children without delay."

"But you'd already brought the children to Demyansk, hadn't you?"

"Yes, we'd lodged them all. But they only spent two or three nights there, when the order came for urgent evacuation again. By then we already knew that the Germans were moving fast towards us."

"Were there many children with you?"

"Yes, very many."

"Several hundred?"

"Far more than that! I can't tell you exactly how many there were now. Altogether about 6,000 were evacuated from the Kirov district, but some of them were later sent to Yaroslavl region. So we had to start re-evacuation. Just imagine! We had nurseries with us too. We also evacuated nursery schools, you see, but now they too had to turn back, almost without rest. But the Germans, they were almost there (Demyansk was 40 kilometres from the railway station of Lychkovo). The Germans landed an extremely large group of paratroopers there, and we were cut off. Then pursuit detachments were organised and the paratroopers were scattered. Well, so we started re-evacuating the children."

"What did you have by way of transport?"

"Oh! Whatever we were lucky enough to find. The army gave us a lot of help. Military vehicles began to take our children back. I even recall such an episode. As I was travelling along, I saw a bus parked by the roadside, one of ours. I jumped out of the car. Why was it standing there? The children had to be got away as quickly as possible! I went over to the driver who was lying on the ground, asleep. I went to him and said: 'Comrade!' He replied: 'Well, now I can go on. It's four nights since I slept. Now I've had a little rest and I'm off again. But I was afraid to continue like that.' I remember that it was a fine day, a lovely day. Then bombing started at Lychkovo, on the railway station. At that time there were children from the Dzerzhisky district at Lychkovo. They were taken even further away than ours, to the Maloosminsky district. Where were our children? I dashed into a big house, for I knew that the children were always put into good houses. The nursery school teacher was sitting there, with the children around her. Goodness, how many of them there were! And each time a bomb exploded they all cried: 'Mummy! Mummy! Mummy!' It was dreadful! For the first time in my life I lied to a child. 'Don't be afraid,' I said. 'Nothing to be afraid of! They're our planes!' As for myself, I went out onto the porch, and, you know, he was flying so low, he'd take a look, press a button—and a bomb would immediately explode. Later on they claimed they hadn't known. What rubbish! They knew very well, and, of course, they could see everything perfectly well. The fact was that the children from the Dzerzhinsky district were already boarding the train then, and they bombed the kids at the station. It was very fine weather. The children were dressed in their best, bright clothes. He could see very well what he was bombing... Well, later on, when we had taken all the children out of Lychkovo, I said: 'All the same I'm going back to Demyansk, because I have to check whether we have taken all the children away.'

"We arrived there and telephoned all the village Soviets. The only children left behind were the wounded. And then, I remember as if it

were only yesterday, Vasily Yakovlevich and I went to the hospital where our children were being cared for. As we were walking along we suddenly saw a group of German war prisoners being led along the road (there must have been several parties of paratroopers there). I said: 'The devil take you! Just you wait! The time will come when our fliers will kill your children, too!' Vasili Yakovlevich said to me: 'Come now, do you really think our pilots would kill children? It's only brutes like these who can do that.' We started to send away the wounded children. We sent them off to Leningrad in good hands—with doctors and nurses. We ourselves went to the Kirov region. At this point my deputy was sent from Leningrad to give me a hand. He had to come and help me because the parents were in a terrible state! What would you expect! What more precious than a child, after all?!

"Before we'd arrived at Kotelnich station the station-master came aboard the train and asked: 'Is the authorised Leningrad representative of the Kirov district executive committee on the train?' 'Yes, it's me,' I replied. 'You know, they've sent a message from Kirov advising you not to get out at Kotelnich.' 'Why?' I asked. 'There's a crowd of parents waiting for you!' 'Do you follow me? The parents had travelled to Kotelnich hunting us. You understand? Anatoly Ivanovich, my assistant, said: 'Don't get out! Let me go instead!' 'What do you mean by saying that?' I asked. 'My conscience is clear. I'll get out myself. Don't let me even hear of such a thing!' We drew in at Kotelnich. I remember I had on a very light-coloured coat. I got off the train, and the women started shouting and raising hell. Well, they saw that I was calm. I said: 'You know, comrades, if you're going to behave like that, we won't get anything sorted out. You ask me the questions that are worrying you and I'll answer them all, because all the children have been taken back apart from those who've been wounded.' 'We've met those, we've seen them,' they said. 'The first thing I want to tell you is that literally all the children have been brought back. There's just one little girl I don't know about, that's Belova...' After that they began to ask me about individual children. But I couldn't say where that one child was. You understand? We took the lists, went right through them, and she wasn't there! I said: 'Wait, all the same, I'll find her!' What I remember well is that coat I was wearing. I sat right down on the railway sleepers in my light-coloured coat! But the women shouted: 'Get up, get up! Why are you sitting down, you'll ruin your coat!' So I saw that the mood had changed. Well, all right. I stayed for two days in Kotelnich, all the time looking for that little girl. She turned out to be in that very boarding school, but under another surname. I told her mother: 'Here's the address, that's where your daughter is...' After that I went to live in Kirov."

"Tell us what happened to those children. Were they sent off somewhere to the east?"

"No, why should they have been? A large proportion remained in the Kirov region, but it was not only our district that was evacuated there. In the region there were about 60,000 evacuated children altogether."

But before long, many of them returned to Leningrad.

Alexandra Arsenyeva and her daughter were among those who came back.

When we returned to Leningrad, they asked us: 'Refugees, where are you from?' (Asking that of me, a native Leningrader, me, whose grandfather was a Leningrader.) 'Where are you from, refugees?' Only the cashier from our shop recognised us and said: 'Oh! It's our neighbours, they're from that house over there, I know them very well!'

"Were you to that extent unrecognisable when you returned?"

"We got off the train, some in coats, some in dressing-gowns. We travelled a very long time to Mga, about three days. When they began shelling the coaches, there were immediately dead and wounded. We put the children under the seats with mattresses on top of them for protection and flung ourselves on top the mattresses."

"In the coaches?"

"Exactly. A bomb fell on the engine... All the same, we managed, when things quietened down a bit, to get out of the coach. It was already getting dark. The station was on fire. We couldn't find anybody. It was absolutely dreadful! The chief of the evacuation train was sitting on a stump, clasping his head in his hands. He had lost his family, and had no idea who was where... Every time we heard some kind of noise or the sound of shooting, we would get down into a ditch, the children like this, flat on the ground, and we would lie on top of them. And I would throw blankets over them. Later, when we stood up, the children persisted in pulling the blankets over their heads. Some time after, we noticed something moving, something covered in fir-tree branches. We thought it might be a camouflaged train. We made for the station, to the railway lines, and it was a train indeed. It was slowly, slowly moving. It would stop, then move on again. All the coaches were locked up. In one lot of doors a soldier was standing, and he said: 'Young lady! How about giving me your mattress? The carriage's full of wounded.' I gave him the mattress and flung my daughter to him."

"Into the carriage?"

"Yes. I threw my daughter in and said: 'Take her to Leningrad.' And I wanted to get in myself. But the wheels were turning and I couldn't. And that with my daughter already in the carriage! Suddenly I noticed the wheels were grinding to a halt. I ran after the train, shouting, 'Take me!' But he shouted back: 'I can't! We're packed in like sardines as it is. Can't strike a match. And the wounded are moaning.' I said: 'Listen, I've got a bottle of wine for the wounded. And in my shoulder bag I've some other things.' (My shoulder bag was a big one.) He said: 'Well then, come on!' I threw the bag in and clung on myself. How he did it I don't know, but he got hold of me and dragged me aboard. Later I gave everything I had in the bag to the wounded. My raisins went from hand to hand, and the wine was passed round, too. The men were all groaning. I took off my coat and covered them with it, because they were freezing cold. And when we got to the Sortirovochnaya station and began to

detrain the wounded, I found that my coat was covered with blood. So I had nothing on top of my dress, and it was hellishly cold! ”

“That was in September, wasn’t it?”

“It was September 30, and the Germans had already taken Mga. We arrived, and started taking off the wounded. Someone there told me: ‘Your daughter’s at the station, you’ll find her there.’ And later on I did find her, sitting at the foot of a column. Someone had given her a padded jacket, and she was covered with it.”

“What is your daughter’s name?”

“Yevgenia Stroganova. She heads a department at a planning organisation.”

“And she was five then?”

“Yes, five years old. My daughter—she really saved my life. Although who saved whom it’s hard to tell. A clever little thing, not very talkative. After Mga she didn’t talk to anyone for a long time. She went to school, and got top marks for everything, but she didn’t talk much...”

Children had to be brought back quickly from the endangered areas. The problem was tackled by Leningrad organisations, local authorities and the mothers themselves. Lydia Okhapkina also tried to get her son back.

“Once, after the shelling stopped, I ran with my little daughter in my arms to get bread. I had to get this done while it was quiet. In front of me stood a bespectacled woman of about 60-63, with the look of an intellectual, and she started saying that she meant to get bread for two days ahead because she was leaving to fetch her grandson. I asked her where her grandson had been evacuated. She told me he had gone with nursery school No. 21 (I remember the exact number), which meant he had gone precisely to the place where we’d sent my little boy! At first hesitant, I then began asking her to bring my son back too. She started by refusing, assuring me that the road was being bombed, that she was afraid they might be hit and she did not want to be responsible for my son getting killed. I saw her point, of course, but there was no one else I could send. So I clung to her, in thought, of course, and began begging her, imploring, and finally burst into tears with emotion. Then I took hold of her hands and started kissing them. I kept saying: oh, please, I beg you, have pity on him, and on this poor child in my arms, too. ‘How could I go with a baby, how would I feed her... I beg you, fetch him, help me, I’ll never forget you—and so on and so forth.

“She agreed, and even shed a few tears herself. She asked how old my little boy was. I said he’d soon be six (I was lying). He was sturdy, could run well, and could walk a long way if necessary.

“The next day I had to get a document through the district Soviet enabling me to bring the child back. I thought it would be simple, but it turned out to be quite difficult. When I arrived at the Moscow district Soviet, carrying my baby daughter in my arms, there was already a



crowd of mothers there. They were all agitated, making a lot of noise, and some were even shouting, 'Bring back our children! Better to have them back with us here and to die together, than to have them killed God knows where.' The man who was writing out the documents did his utmost to calm them, explaining that the authorities had wanted to do things in the best way possible, and hurriedly gave out the documents. He gave me an authorisation allowing the woman to act on my behalf. I went straight to her place. I gave her all the bread I had, and a little money. She left the same day. And I started waiting impatiently for their return.

"One day I came back from the bomb shelter after the all-clear had gone, exhausted mentally and physically, and immediately lay down and dropped off to sleep. Suddenly I was awakened by the deafening sounds of heavy artillery fire. In those days I used to sleep in my dress and stockings, so I jumped up and grabbed Nina, the rucksack containing everything necessary for the baby, my documents and money, and I ran out of the room into the corridor. The glass in my windows had been broken long ago. At that moment the door flew off its hinges as a result of blast. I dashed out onto the porch and saw that shells were flying straight along our street, and so low, not higher than the street lamps. I didn't know what to do; I was afraid to run to the bomb shelter as the shells were flying in that direction and it was in the path of the bombs. I was so terrified that my legs and feet were trembling, and felt like jelly, and my daughter started to slip from my arms. I sat down on the porch. A neighbour ran up to me and took the child. 'What do you think you're doing sitting here?' she asked. 'Calm down, we'll go

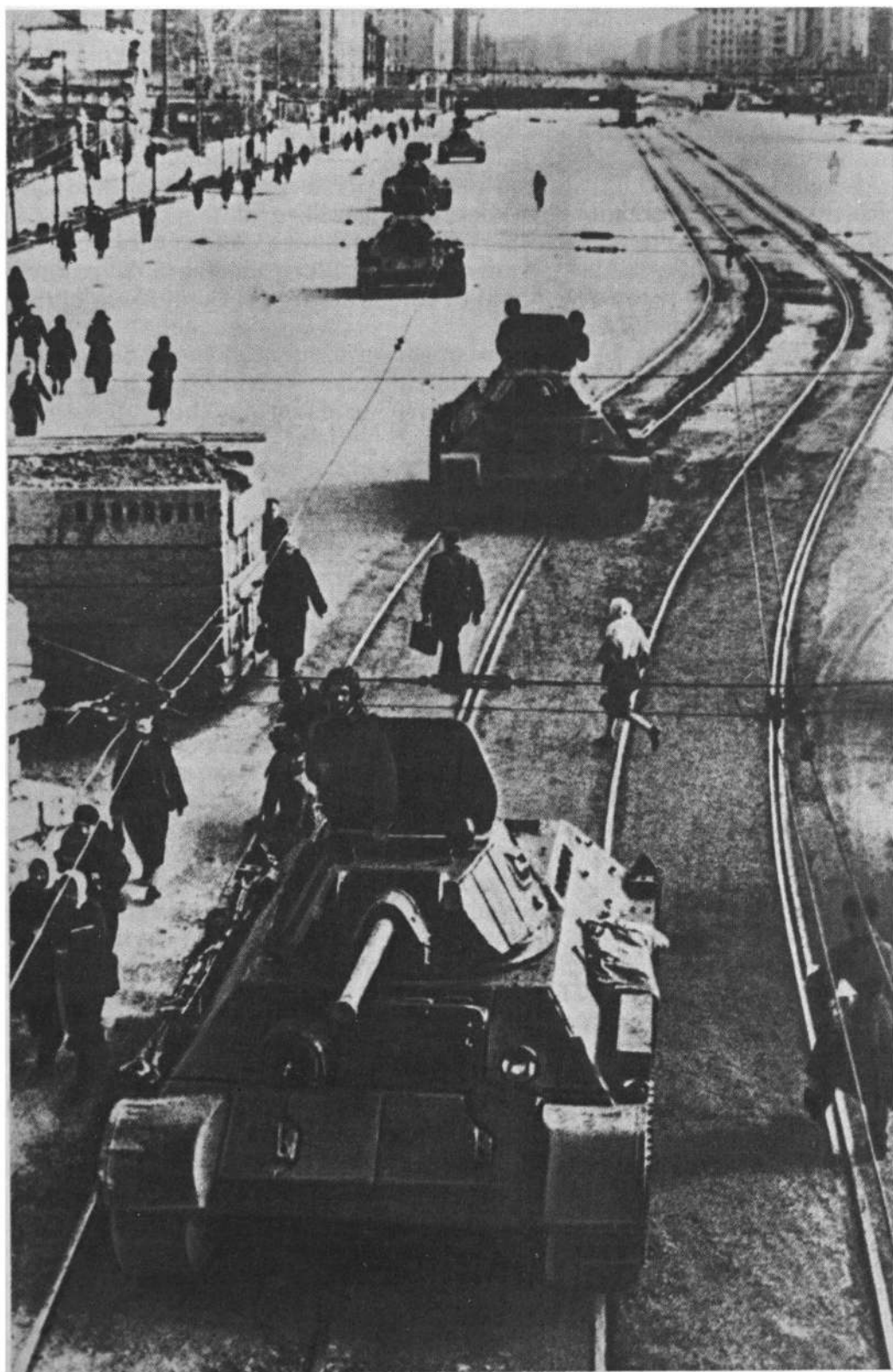
to the shelter. See, the bombs are falling and exploding further on, over there, where the carburettor plant is.'

"Suddenly we heard a terrible explosion, and there was black smoke all around. A bomb had been dropped not far away, where the petrol tanks were standing. They'd managed to remove the petrol, but the empty tanks, almost the size of our house, had remained, and that's where the bomb had exploded. There was a smell of burning, the earth was on fire, soaked as it was with petrol and paraffin, and the ribbons of smoke and flame extended further and further. Many houses in the neighbourhood burned down, and we were afraid ours might catch fire too. The sky was black and crimson, with splashes of red and yellow.

"I went back home. One of my neighbours, an old man, rehung the door for me, and I began to make my daughter some very thin semolina with water on the paraffin stove. I decided that as soon as they brought Tolya to me, we'd get away somewhere quickly."

Two weeks went by, two weeks in which Lydia Okhapkina was in a state of extreme tension as she waited for her son's return. .

"At long last, as I was looking out of the window one day, I saw a woman and two boys standing there. One of them I recognised as my own. I ran down and put my arms about him, and began to kiss and thank the woman. She told me that the journey had been a very difficult one. They had travelled for a short while by train, and when it was bombed they had to run from the coaches. They'd covered a long distance on foot, and got a few lifts on lorries going their way, and also on carts and horses... I thanked her. The next day I went once more to the district Soviet to get evacuation documents. Where we'd go, I didn't know. It was all the same to me, as long as I got out of Leningrad. I'd have liked to get to Saratov, where my mother lived, but to get there you had to travel through Moscow, and there weren't any trains going there. It was already the end of August. But the arrangements were broken off, because I lost Tolya again. When I arrived at the district Soviet office, there were a great many people crowding round the doors—mostly women, but some men, too. They also wanted to get away, and had come for documents. The door was shut. Everybody was agitated, they were all shouting and banging on the door. I led Tolya to one side so he wouldn't be crushed. Suddenly there was an air raid alarm. The door opened, and I was pushed inside by people standing behind me. I managed to shout, 'Tolya, run to me, quick!' but when I was able to look round there was no sign of him. I asked them to open the door, but they wouldn't. I started getting the documents together hastily, asking to be dealt with at the head of the queue, explaining that my child was out in the street alone. I was awfully worried. When I heard the all-clear go, I rushed outside and began looking for him, shouting: 'Tolya! Tolya!' but he was nowhere to be seen. I began asking everyone I came across: 'Have you seen a little boy wearing a white panama hat and a dark blue coat, with brown eyes,



five years old?' They all said: 'No, no!' I rushed in one direction, then in the other, all the while asking: 'Have you seen a little boy?' They all answered: 'No, no!' Where on earth was he then? What could I do, where could I go? With all those people around, far away from our home, he was sure to get lost. He knew our address, but, after all, he might forget it, or mix things up!

"Tanks were rolling along International Avenue towards Sredniaya Rogatka, and a column of soldiers was marching along. Many were in army uniforms, but many others were in civvies. They were going to forward positions. Behind them, or rather alongside them, were those who were seeing them off, mostly women, of course. Some were crying. In front a brass band was playing.

"It struck me that my little boy might have run after them. So I rushed after the column, shouting all the time: 'Tolya, Tolya!' The baby in my arms was crying—she was probably hungry and wet. Catching up with the soldiers, I walked alongside them, still shouting: 'Tolya, Tolya!' The people and the soldiers thought I was calling one of them, and some of them looked round. I was tired and my hair was messed up by the wind. I'd been wearing a beret, but had lost it. I saw that my son wasn't there and I sat on some porch and cried.

"Well that's it, I thought, I won't be leaving tomorrow, which means I'm fated to remain in Leningrad. A woman came up to me and asked what was the matter. I explained that I'd lost my little boy and that the next day we were supposed to leave the city. She advised me to go to the militia, they were bound to help. When I got to the militia station and began to tell my story, the militiaman couldn't understand a word I said, for I was sobbing all the time. He gave me a glass of water to calm me down. When I was finally calm and was able to make myself clear, he started ringing up other offices, explaining that a boy called Tolya had been lost and that he should be brought to this particular militia station if found. I waited there till nine o'clock in the evening. The baby was crying, and I could not quieten her at all. The people there suggested that I go home, since you weren't supposed to stay in the streets after nine without a special pass. I went home.

"I couldn't sleep all night, of course. By now I wasn't thinking about getting away anywhere. The next morning I went to the militia. I saw Tolya straightaway—he was sitting on the windowsill with tear-stained cheeks. We were both overjoyed and he wept. The militiaman explained that Tolya had kept trying to get home by tram, saying that Mum was waiting for him. He'd got on a tram and gone somewhere, but said he didn't know where to get off. He'd got on the wrong tram, of course. Then he'd started crying. Some woman had handed him over to a militiaman on traffic duty, and he had only been able to take Tolya to the militia station when he came off duty. And then it wasn't the right station, but a different one, and he'd spent the night there. Only in the morning had they brought him to this militia station.

"It was 10.30, and we were supposed to have left Leningrad at 8 a.m. We were already late. I couldn't start petitioning all over again today

or tomorrow for new evacuation papers. That incident with my son decided everything—I remained in Leningrad.”

That incident decided the fate of Lydia Okhapkina and her children. If her son hadn't got lost, if there had not been an air raid warning at that moment, if they'd brought him from the militia immediately, when his mother was still waiting for him, then she and her children would have left the city the next morning. They would not have remained in Leningrad, and everything would have turned out differently. Her thoughts often return to that incident, which she considers a turning-point in her life.

GEORGI KNYAZEV'S SMALL RADIUS

But let us get back to Georgi Knyazev's "small radius" on the Neva embankment, along which he travelled every day from home to the Archives in his wheel-chair with the hand controls—the same old 800 metres.

“19.7.41. Day 28. When I was sitting in the garden during an alarm, before me arose, in an unusual foreshortening, the silhouettes of my constant companions—the sphinxes—against a clear July sky. The sun was reflected off their glossy red-brown backs... How much for me is associated with those sphinxes, how many thoughts and images connected with past and future... I am but an instant, they are virtually eternal. Even if a high-explosive bomb were to fall nearby, it is hardly likely that both sphinxes would be destroyed, one would probably survive. Both my notes and verses of many years have also been closely connected with the Neva sphinxes, as have my thoughts, my worries, and my 'premonitions'. I could not, of course, visualise all the events specifically, but I did foresee the black night of the great humanist culture. And further ahead, in the distance—the light of dawn, the sun once more. But right now a fearful, bloody black night for culture... The heart contracts when one thinks that everything the Soviet people have built up with such effort and heroism in the last 23 years is being completely ruined. A terrible hatred grips me when I think of those invaders who dream of subjugating entire peoples and turning them into humble slaves. We shall not become slaves! We have a sacred aim—self-defence from the bandits. What will the conquerors bring to the world? The unbridled rule of the 'chosen' caste, rulers introducing their new order...

“As I sat in the garden this prospect clouded my brain. I looked at the sphinxes... 'You have seen everything, but you have not yet seen such frightful human misfortune. The whole world's ablaze! And on the ashes of the old world are the terrifying inhuman visages of jackals that have mastered advanced technology! You sphinxes were created

in slave-owning Egypt. But that was three and a half millennia ago... Can it possibly be that you will yet again stand silently among a once free people who have become slaves?"

"How glad I was to hear the harmonious sound of the all-clear! Everyone came out from beneath their mounds of earth and got on with their work or went on their way..."

"20.7.41. Day 29. We need organisation, the strictest discipline. But we haven't enough of this! We haven't learnt to work in an organised, coordinated way. We are only learning that in war conditions. Wherever I can I try to introduce this mood of cheerfulness and perseverance. But I'm just a grain of sand in a vast human sea.

"The table lamp is shielded on three sides so that the light falls only on the table and does not illuminate the corners of the room. As I write these lines I think to myself that perhaps in a few more days or even hours, there'll be nothing left of all this writing but ash. All the same, I'm continuing my diary. I'm trying to convey what others will not write, even trifles, even such touches as the fact that Academician Alexeyev's wife is doing duty at the gates in an elegant hat and kid gloves. Today when I went to the Rumyantsev Garden I saw factory and office workers sitting at the tables, having come here to play dominoes. All the old familiar faces of the last three or five years! They were playing as if nothing special had happened. When the air alarm went they crawled into the trenches.

People are walking along the streets, the trams are rattling by, small boys are wandering about. They're particularly drawn to my sphinxes these days, to my favourites. They clamber onto their backs, onto their heads, tap the petrified eyes and ears of these once proud rulers. By the sphinxes are heaps of sand that have been dumped there. It is being shovelled up by women, girls and teenagers and thrown into lorries. The city is living a busy workaday life. There is no sign of agitation, no noticeable despondency. Traffic in the streets has dropped sharply, but some of the army vehicles race along at incredible speeds paying but scant attention to the traffic regulations. Consequently I prefer to travel in my wheel-chair along the pavement, at walking pace at the most.

"I had a talk with the superintendent of our house. 'It's awful,' he said, 'that the fighting is being done on our territory. There's so much destruction. Why did we surrender the fortifications on the old state border just like that?' There was nothing I could say in reply. We have very little information. I still don't know how near, or how far the Germans are from us. Is there a serious threat to Leningrad, or not?"

"On a lovely summer day like this Leningrad is crowded. This evening there are a lot of people strolling along the embankment. The peat is on fire around Leningrad, and there is smoke over the city. It's just impossible to believe that we're at war—everything's so calm, if only outwardly. There are throngs of people, old and young, strolling past the sphinxes. Right here, although it's evening, some boys are bathing. We haven't seen any wounded so far, nor any refugees. Where have the thousands of people gone from the West Ukraine, Western Byelorussia, Lithuania and Latvia?"

"I looked at a woman playing with her child—the yardkeeper's wife. Such a peaceful idyll, but she is carrying a gas mask. She plays with the child, all the time looking at the sky—are they flying? And how many such mothers have been robbed of their children, of their homes, of their lives!

"I haven't removed from the table a maliciously laughing imp. How impudently he stares at me, seeming to say contemptuously: 'Well, you humanist of humanists, happy with the "documents of progress" presented to you in your old age? Naive, foolish dreamer. It's not peace but war that's the law of all living things...'

"And I feel the atmosphere becoming oppressive, unbearable. Don't torment me, imp, my brain's already tormented as it is.

"What I fear no less than the nazi plague is chauvinist hysteria. For us a war is sacred as a defence against attacking vultures, but it is quite a different thing when it is waged to rule another nation. And in this connection the question arises of the real guilt of the German people, who have brought such suffering to mankind. What would Hitler have done had a significant part of the German people refused to support him? It's an agonising question..."

That was written by a "passive defender of Leningrad"—a man who did not shoot at the enemy, in any case, and at whom (so far) the enemy was not shooting. Only the buzzing propellers—whether real or imagined due to nervous tension—hung over him.

But here before us are notes made by a man who was both firing and under fire—artilleryman *Sergei Milyayev*, former staff member at the Saltykov-Schedrin Public Library. Two years later he was killed near Vitebsk, but at that time his battery was involved in the defence of Leningrad. He, too, had his "small radius of observation", but his was a radius under fire, for he was a soldier. He was also a Leningrader, and an intellectual, and he was tormented by practically the same questions as Knyazev.

"I've finished *The Red and the Black*, which I re-read with great pleasure. Now I've nothing to read. Of course, that's boring. But we are, after all, on defence. Since there's nothing to do I'm writing down that quite well-known, very important place in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* by Engels: '...It is the ascent of man from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom.*' I have very little time left to live. Even if I remain alive after this war I shall nevertheless die in the transition period, so a large part of my time will still be spent on the individual struggle for existence, as Engels put it. How many wonderful days are wasted on this struggle! "

* Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works* in three volumes, Vol. Three, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1973, p. 150.—Ed.

Leningrad artilleryman Milyayev read extracts from a work popular in those days and immediately noted:

"It seemed to me from the extract that the author is proclaiming the thesis of 'class blood' (the enemy's offspring are also our enemies). Is this any better than the thesis of 'Aryan blood'?"

The question is not whether Sergei Milyayev understood the work correctly or incorrectly. The main thing is that both he and Knyazev were conscious of the danger of slipping into chauvinist attitudes, with which the world was already poisoned.

So that's what the defenders of Leningrad were like at the start of the war. Here Leningrad's intellectual traditions had their effect, as did the internationalist education of the people in the years before the war.

As the diaries of Georgi Knyazev show, it was not easy to maintain that lofty sense of brotherhood within oneself. Righteous hatred of a ruthless enemy who was bringing so much grief at times became unbearably acute. Naïve and oversimplified formulas vanished, but the consciousness remained, and even grew stronger, that the cruel struggle and all the sacrifices and sufferings were justified precisely because they were not for the sake of the rule of one nation over another but in the name of a future without wars, without cruelty, and for the sake of life and human dignity.

This was written in the first weeks of the war, when hatred for the Germans was growing, when we soldiers were parting bitterly and painfully with prewar illusions, with hopes of quick international help, and faith in the class consciousness of the German workers. Later, much later, we learnt to distinguish Germans from nazis.

"10.8.41. Day 50. So everything is changing. A year ago Britain was consigned to the grave, with her maritime and world might. Today Britain is not a coffin floating on the sea waves. Britain, with help from the USA, maintains her supremacy on the seas. And Britain is not an enemy but an ally. We and Britain are fighting side by side against a common enemy—Hitler Germany. What an anachronism today is that cartoon of a coffin-ship!

"How many changes—unforeseen, unexpected—have taken place in world politics in the last few years! It is difficult for us ordinary people, even if we are historians, to understand all this. For that reason I am not trying to analyse much. I am only stating facts. Last year we did not have the faintest notion of what was to happen this year. So what awaits us next year? Communism is, after all, as alien to the British liberal-conservative bourgeois democracy as it is to nazi Germany... How many contradictions there are here.

"11.8.41. Day 51. Our stoker, Urmancheyev, has gone off to join the army. He left behind three children and a young, not very bright

wife... Just after he'd left, after a painful scene of parting when he asked us to look after his wife and children, we learnt that compulsory evacuation had been announced for children under 14 and their mothers. Leningrad will be bombed, that is inevitable. Those who express the opinion that the Germans will not do this are either out-and-out provocateurs or stupid chatterboxes. Children and mothers should leave Leningrad, there can be no two ways about it. The non-working mothers are to be evacuated on the 15th, and the working, on the 23rd, both by barge. The mothers are in despair. What will they do there, how will they earn a living in those places where they are to be evacuated?!

"For my collection of 'documents of progress'. An illustration from the magazine *Ogonyok*, 11.6.41. A monument to Milton, demolished by a nazi bomb in England. As for what's been destroyed in the West Ukraine, Western Byelorussia, Lithuania, we don't have any pictures so far. Evidently these pictures would have made a considerable collection.

"Day by day hatred for the oppressors laying waste our land, our homes, our national heritage, is growing more and more bitter. But we've not yet lost a sense of compassion for the enemy. Take one of the documents as illustration. Prisoner-of-war pilot Ernst Reiz is receiving first aid at the hands of Dr. E. I. Nevirovich and nurse V. P. Vasilieva.

"14.8.41. Day 54. It has been an agonising, wearisome day. Something bad has happened at the front. At midday it became known that Smolensk had fallen. The news stunned us. The Germans are somewhere beyond Lake Ilmen. The city's full of all kinds of rumours. The women are in a particularly nervous state. Until the last few days they retained their self-control, but now their nerves are giving way. The qualities I've found so heartening are wearing away. One woman who did not want to subject her child to the ordeal of evacuation was told at the district Soviet: 'You don't want to leave Leningrad in an organised fashion? Later on you'll go on foot.' What's this? Preparations for the evacuation of the entire populace, for the surrender of Leningrad? Today even the staunch are falling prey to fear.

"I've just been trying to read the history of mankind, which I've started, but I couldn't make myself read, I was so tired. It's been such a hard day. I'm trying to muster my strength to overcome the trials and tribulations ahead. Fate made me a witness, or rather a contemporary, of great and staggering events. Smolensk also fell in August, in 1812. The Battle of Borodino was on 26th August. In September Napoleon entered Moscow. How are events going to develop now? And where do the Germans get such strength, such diabolical persistence! "

OF THOSE WHO WERE NEARBY

In Georgi Knyazev's diary, naturally enough, there is a great deal about people who lived and worked side by side with him on his "small radius"—about Maria Fyodorovna, his wife, about his colleagues at the

Archives, about the residents in his house, people working at the Academy of Sciences, the university, the Zoological Museum, and so on. His notes are detailed, made daily, and in places prejudiced (the passions and evaluations of prewar years could not help leaving their mark on Knyazev). But step by step, in the face of the mortal danger threatening his country and experiencing the world drama both as an individual and as a historian, Georgi Knyazev rid himself of various old and new misconceptions.

Confiding to his diary his thoughts on those "with whom you do not win", and "those with whom you win", describing dozens of real human types and lives, Georgi Knyazev gradually creates a complex portrait of the blockaded Leningrader, as he observed him on his own "small radius". Among the many is the portrait of his wonderful, self-sacrificing wife Maria. The two of them had met when they were young, and both preparing for scientific work. But gradually, the two of them, both highly independent, with characters of their own, seemed to merge into one being. The extraordinary spiritual energy of this little woman, a Komi by nationality, became concentrated on her husband, a man, crippled by illness. The feeling of regret that she had abandoned her scientific work, if it ever occurred to her, had been overcome by another feeling, the realisation that with her assistance Georgi Knyazev worked for the two of them, that without her he would not have been able to do so much.

"M. F. used to say to me: 'I love life, nature. I have since childhood...' She is bearing up firmly and heroically during these terrible days. Like myself, she is ready for anything. A wonderful, splendid woman! Surely fate won't part us, make one of us the witness of the misfortune or death of the other? If we are to die, then let it be together..."

At that time there were a great many rumours flying around about people one knew. It was not easy to distinguish truth from fabrication. Georgi Knyazev tried to observe the maximum honesty in his notes. He would correct himself, refute what he had previously said if something new turned up.

"I do not record a multitude of ridiculous rumours. I would not like anything invented to be reported in my notes in the guise of facts."

That was why, for instance, he refuted the gossip about a well-known literary scholar who was said to have fled from Leningrad, and what was more, in a motor boat! That man was in Leningrad, Knyazev had seen him and recorded that fact, having learned that he had been away for a while and that "this had provided grounds for the infamous and scurrilous gossip".

He changed his opinion of I. L., a woman colleague at the Archives, of whom he had previously expressed an unflattering view.

"Looking at her in these grim days, I can forgive her a lot. She is suffering, and taking part in the common work of the collective. She bears heavy responsibilities at work and has social duties. Now she is motivated by an unselfish feeling, not by careerism, as seemed to me at the start of the war when she signed up for the People's Volunteers. In all truth, she is one of those forming the backbone of the country. With people like that you win! "

He was to return time and time again to the characters of these and other people in his notes, assessing them more objectively, from all sides, as the increasingly severe circumstances forced people to look deeper and deeper within themselves, and to see others more clearly, understand them better. But for the time being many people's thoughts were governed not by self-analysis or reflection, but by initial emotions.

"S.A.Sch., an ethnographer, came to us at the Archives to hand in her scientific work. We talked.

"I feel a revulsion against life. In the twentieth century, we're suddenly faced with these mass murders and devastation."

"Revulsion against life with a self-destructive culture—this is the mood beginning to dominate the minds of thinking people. Human beings have not improved—they've deteriorated, become more cruel and treacherous, baser and meaner... That's what many are thinking right now..."

"I went back to the open window in the next room. It's a quiet, warm starry night. The flashes of summer lightning (or gunfire) have stopped. Remote impassive stars, disturbing the spirit, forming a scattered pattern in the dark sky, could it be that in your starry world, where there is life, the same kind of thing is going on? Is it possible that war, brutal mass murder of one's own kind, one's brothers, can be an eternal, immutable law?

"The night is nearing its end. It's getting light. My watch is finishing. There have been no alarms. Once again the Germans have not bombed Leningrad. This is giving rise to considerable surprise and a wide range of interpretations, sometimes of a most primitive nature—right down to the idea that Hitler's daughter wants this magnificent northern capital intact!

"What will today bring? There are just two hours left to sleep before I leave for the Archives. My heart feels as though someone has trampled upon it, as if it were breaking. Perhaps at some not far-off time, when... I shall not try to peer into the future. I shall be decent, businesslike and efficient. To the end.

"I see before me three portraits: Lev Tolstoy, Turgenev and Chekhov. And to one side, Dostoyevsky. My teachers in love for man, for mankind, great humanists. I shall remain faithful to my teachers!

"The papers carry a lot of declarations, expressions of sympathy and so on from America, Britain and other countries. We are fed up with reading verbal aid... Even now there is no second front!

"23.8.41. Day 63. On the night of August 22 and also on the 23rd, we were expecting the bombing of Leningrad. On the 22nd it was two months since the start of the war and a month after the first raid on Moscow. This has become a cabalistic date. There was, however, no bombing of Leningrad. No one can understand why the Germans don't touch Leningrad. There are more stories being concocted in an attempt to explain things."

Yes, "in war folk lie". For example, an absurd rumour was going around that Vasilievsky Island would not be bombed, because, people said, Rosenberg had been born there. Or that there were a lot of Germans living there, old St Petersburgers whose families had lived there since Peter the Great's time. So some of the more gullible moved in with relatives and acquaintances on the "safe" island...

Georgi Knyazev writes in his diary:

"No doubt some conclusions could be drawn from all these rumours by those studying mass psychology. Chernov, the historian, for instance, has written a research work on the rumours circulating at the time of the Decembrist uprising. In rumours one can discern both the cherished hopes of certain sections of the population and the influence exerted by the enemy. They are a kind of indicator of the public mood. But that is a special subject, and one that I cannot really go into in my notes. I don't mix with people and hear their news all that much. For one thing, I never stand in queues, go to the market and so on. And these are the chief centres of all kinds of rumours. By the way, perhaps it would be worthwhile attempting, as a counterweight to wild rumours, to make use of able propaganda to spread healthy rumours that would reinforce willpower and optimism.

..."We are all hoping now that the Germans, pressed to the coast, will be taken prisoner, or wiped out by the Baltic Fleet artillery. Somehow we've grown calm. We've spent the day in the hope that the Germans will be hurled back from Leningrad. Another hope we have is that Budyonny's army in the south has managed to break out of encirclement! "

There they are—also rumours. Although apparently "positive" rumours. Like those that both excited and lulled Leningraders—about the army of Kulik, which was supposed to be about to encircle the Germans who had Leningrad within their tight ring. Who knows how many thousands of people obstinately and foolishly refused to obey the order about evacuation, because they gave credence to such rumours and illusions. (The deputy chairman of the Leningrad City Soviet, I. Andreyenko, speaks of this in the first part of the book.)

"25.8.41. Day 65. The existing information is quite inadequate. All to a man assert that the Kingisepp positions are in our hands. Smolensk as well... But the situation in the south is difficult. Today N.T. told me confidentially that the next few days would decide Leningrad's fate. It would be declared an open city. That was why there was no bombing. That was why the evacuation of mothers and children had been stopped. A radius of approximately 32 km from the city centre would be included within its boundaries. Now it is very difficult to leave Leningrad... After his visit I was heavy-hearted. Aren't we really going to drive the Germans away from Leningrad? What's going on—why, suddenly, is there such monstrous pressure on the south and the north-west, that is, in our area? Where did the enemy get such strength? I calmly look events in the face, but I find it sad that we are not sufficiently well organised to overcome all the difficulties of war..."

In 1941 there were millions of people experiencing such feelings. First disbelief: "The Germans coming to our city? It's not possible!" Shock: "They're already moving in our direction!" And then the nightmarish realities of occupation.

Not all cities were strategic points like Moscow and Leningrad. Of course, in the fate of an individual his village also occupied a strategic position. Life or death, the fate of man, depended on whether the Germans would take it or not.

But in the minds of millions of people the fate of their country was directly linked with two cities—Moscow and Leningrad... There was, of course, grief at the loss of Kiev, Minsk, pride and pain for Sevastopol, and even more pronounced, the tension with which everyone followed the battle of Stalingrad—all these events and sentiments were of national significance. But as long as Moscow stood, and Leningrad held out, many other losses did not seem irremediable.

People are always people, whether in the capital, or in a tiny village. Nevertheless, people who, like Knyazev, were able to understand a great deal, to independently assess events, to weigh things up, could not fail to realise that their personal destinies were also dependent on the fact that they lived in a strategic city. As Georgi Knyazev noted in his diary, not everybody—and not all at once—were aware and fully conscious of this, so as to bear it in mind to the end. The rumours spread, the illusions bore fruit—at times fruit that was harmful to the cause, to steadfastness. Evidently the rumours about Leningrad becoming an open city were of that kind.

It was not the existence of rumours and delusions that was surprising. Truly amazing was the fact that millions of Leningraders—and testimony of this is the nine hundred days of Leningraders' steadfastness—finding themselves on a strategic sector of the struggle, behaved just as though they were acknowledging: we cannot indulge in weakness, we have no right to, we bear a special responsibility! Because we are Leningraders, we are from Petrograd, we are in full view of the whole country. Everything is on display—our torments, our courage, our readiness to sacrifice all but not the country's second most important city!

"I'M SIXTEEN"

Meanwhile, through all these summer days, Yura Ryabinkin was working, going to the Palace of Young Pioneers, playing chess, reading—what else was there for a Leningrad schoolboy to do that late wartime summer? A friend borrowed something by Mayne Reid from him, while Yura took a book by Lev Tolstoy and an issue of the magazine *Niva*.

"David and I went to the cinema and saw 'The Boxers'... I went to the zoo, had a game of billiards, played chess... For some reason I have a nasty pain in my chest. I've started to cough, too. I'm streaming with sweat day and night... The town of Ostrov, in all probability, has been captured, because the Pskov sector has come into being. Which front does Voroshilov command? Mum's been ordered to report to the Baltic Railway Station to go to Kingisepp to dig trenches. I saw her off at the station."

He is weary, doesn't know what to write. There's a war raging, but nothing of significance is happening to him or around him. All the same he continues neatly writing:

"In the evening, when we came home, Tina turned up unexpectedly from Shlisselburg. She's been appointed head doctor of a hospital. It was agreed that if anything should happen to Mum, she will take me and Ira... They say we're going to study this winter (8th, 9th and 10th classes). I don't put much faith in that. To be alive is the most you can expect nowadays."

These entries were made on 19th July, 1941. Yura Ryabinkin does not know anything of the ordeals that will come his way, but all the same some premonition has made him keep a diary. It is as though he is preparing himself for something, his feelings are heightened, he does not believe comforting rumours. He has come to understand a lot during this month: "To be alive is the most you can expect nowadays."

Here are more entries:

"Yes ... it's probably the most difficult, most dangerous war we've experienced. Victory's going to cost us dear.

"I've finished reading *A Nest of the Gentry*.

"Played chess with David.

"Mum gave me some money which I used to buy a plate of soup (borsch) and a plate of semolina with butter at the Palace of Labour canteen. Then I came home. At home I learnt to checkmate with a bishop and a knight."

"I've been reading *David Copperfield*.

"Travelled with Mum to do defence construction at Tolmachevo, near Luga."

He describes with pleasure how he dug anti-tank ditches alongside the adults. Those two August weeks were filled with air raid warnings; they were machine-gunned from Messerschmitts, but they dug and dug, for eight hours on end. By that time his friends had begun to leave Leningrad, and Yura's mother was preparing for evacuation. They discussed where they should go. She wanted to be near Leningrad, while Yura for some reason wanted to go to Omsk. He took an increasingly keen interest in events at the front, pondering over them, and feeling depressed at his own passivity.

"26th-27th August. Novgorod was taken several days ago. Leningrad is in danger of being cut off from the USSR. They keep sending us American tanks and planes (Boeings). They bring the Boeings by ship to Vladivostok, and then they are flown, with stops, to Leningrad. Not long ago Japan protested against oil being sent to us from America, claiming that it threatens her interests. Probably Germany had a hand in that. Ours and British troops have entered Iran... Iran is in fourth place for oil.

"I myself engage in matters of little use. I read books, play chess (I finished a game with V.N. Nikitin. I won 11 games out of 17), I study military science and am making a war game.

"There is no more news from Tina.

"30th August... Mum wants me to enrol in the naval training school. But I know the medical commission won't pass me, so I refuse. All the same, it's hard to abandon my dream—the sea, but there's nothing to be done. All my efforts would come to nothing.

"That smells of pessimism.

"I spend the days studying military science, playing chess and reading. My spirits are rock-bottom low. I don't see any prospect, not even a medium-term one, ahead of me. Mum's discharging Nina as from September 1st. Chess, war games, military science. What's the purpose of all this when I have proved incapable of realizing my secret dream of going into the navy. I'm depressed, full of pessimism.

"31st August, 1st September. There was no school today, September 1st. It's not clear when it will open. From September 1st they are selling food only on ration cards. Even matches, salt and things like that will be rationed out. There will be hunger. It'll come slowly but surely.

"Leningrad's surrounded. German paratroopers landed at Ivanovskaya station and cut us off from the rest of the USSR...

"My mood's wretched. I don't know whether I shall ever experience a sense of gaiety again.

"Today, most probably when I was humping heavy sacks about at Mum's workplace—I was helping to remove valuable papers—I cricked my neck...

"The despatches report battles in progress along the whole front. That's all. At night the sky's lit up with flashes of gunfire. Long-range guns are shelling the enemy from our positions. The enemy's 50 kilometres from Leningrad!

"I've been frittering away my time today (only helped Mum a bit at work). I had a talk with Finkelstein. If there aren't going to be any classes at school we'll go through (if we manage it? ! !) the whole of the 9th year school course together. We've got the textbooks.

"Tomorrow I shall be 16. I am 16!

"September 2nd. My birthday has not been marked by anything at all out of the ordinary.

"Mum gave me 5 roubles to go to the canteen. I decided to give myself a treat. I went to the shop and bought a chess textbook. Afterwards I went to the canteen, but all the cheap dishes had already been sold out. Mum came home in the evening and brought me two pies. Then she made soup and I had some. I'm full and happy."

WHAT THE STOICS TAUGHT

On the same day, the 73rd of the war, September 2nd, 1941, Georgi Knyazev writes: "Leningrad has become a front-line city".

By now the windows in the splendid building on Vasilievsky Island had been boarded up with plywood and planks. It was pouring, but in the Rumyantsev Garden the volunteers were undergoing training, throwing grenades. The Knyazevs were stocking up rusks, the only food it was still possible to stock up. Maria Knyazeva had also prepared some first-aid packets that would come in handy in case of a wound or concussion. She was calm, but her husband watched her with a sad smile, thinking that their life, at any rate, was over.

"The newspaper hasn't come. In the showcase outside the university a 'Latest News' is posted up. In brief stereotyped phrases it announces: 'Battles are raging all along the front. Our troops are advancing in Iran.' People gather in front of the showcase in groups. Once again I regret that I can't convey that in a drawing. Vasnetsov once caught the impression—and with what talent—of people reading a military despatch in 1877. A pity that I don't know of any similar work among contemporary artists. Altogether illustrations, popular prints and other such things are very scarce now..."

On Yura Ryabinkin's birthday Georgi Knyazev wrote:

"In the newspapers and over the radio appeals are made to the people to come to the defence of Leningrad. 'We'll defend every street, every

square, make every house a fortress!' But again things don't seem to have gone as they should with the People's Volunteers. And around me, on my small radius, there are no barricades, no ditches, no Volunteer detachments."

Knyazev did not know that divisions of the Volunteers were at that time fighting furiously on the distant approaches to the city. It was largely to their credit that the plan for a victorious blitz and seizure of the city was frustrated. From July, the first, second, and third divisions of the People's Volunteers, manned by thousands of communists from Leningrad's factories and offices, and young people, had been keeping in check Hitler's armies and inflicting considerable damage on them. Georgi Knyazev's limited field of observation and the paucity of information prevented his knowing the real situation with regard to the People's Volunteers. He could only guess—and not always correctly.

"At about midnight there was a thundering of long-range guns or explosions. The sky was lit up with a distant glow. We do not know where the lines of our troops are exactly, but in fact Leningrad is encircled by enemy troops. Today the bread ration was cut and high-price shops closed down. We are assuming the position of a besieged city. We face the approaching ordeals with calmness and forthrightness. Evidently the city is to be defended, not surrendered. To those in charge of us the position is clearer. They must decide the matter from strategic considerations. Leningrad is just an episode in this titanic struggle... But we Leningraders are living people and for us, who are without arms, are not warriors, the events taking place are decisive. Once again I have lit the lamp with the green shade and seated myself at my writing desk. But what will be happening in a few days time is utterly beyond the imagination. Similar examples of the destruction and razing to the ground of tens and hundreds of towns stand out from the scrappy newspaper reports like nightmares. Yet there can be no similar case when it comes to such a colossus as Leningrad... Surely I am not going to be witness to its death?

"To the right of the garden the sphinxes are visible. They stand as before. They have simply been forgotten... Too much to do to bother about them! And they stand there all alone, outside events.

"After this alarming night I took from the wall of my study at the Archives the silhouettes of academicians which were done by Anting in 1783. They have glass frames and I was afraid they might fall down and break. The vase made from the first Soviet porcelain specially for the second centenary of the Academy of Sciences I have laid on its side in the recess on top of the cupboard so that it can't topple over if the building is shaken by blast. I did not do this earlier because I hated to disrupt the order which was helping to discipline our will and our minds... Events are upon us which we had never dreamt of witnessing... Leningrad is in mortal danger!"

Expectation of the unknown weighs all the heavier on a man who is doomed to inactivity (in those conditions he did not consider his work at the Archives of prime importance to the city's defence).

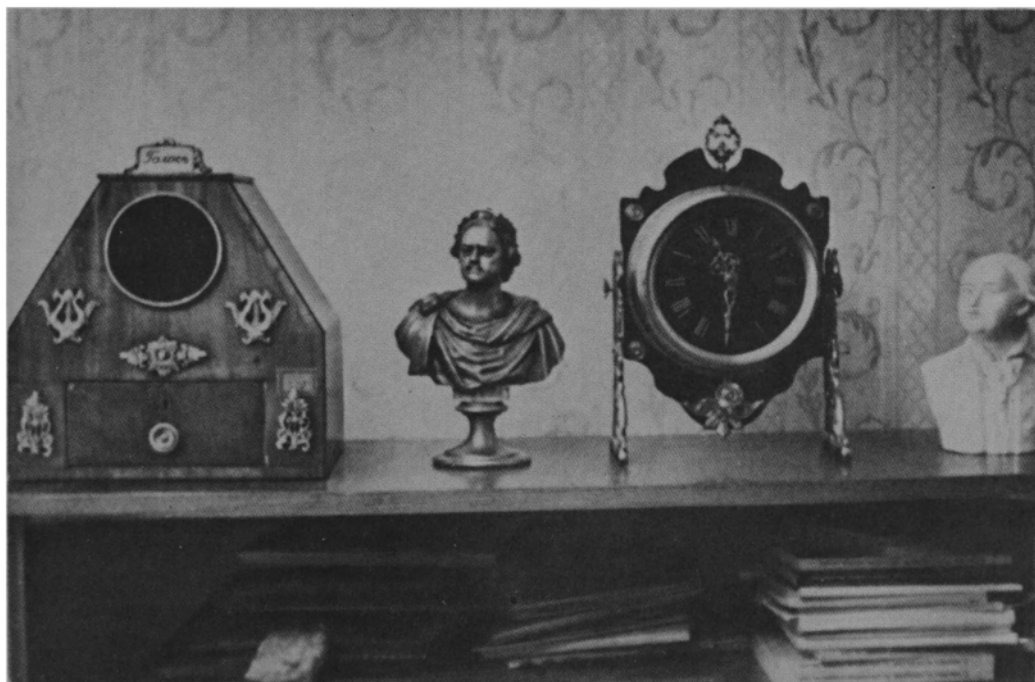
He experienced a feeling of alarm, he had doubts: "Can we keep up the city's defence for long? A magnificent city, never once defiled by an enemy." This is how it was, and without that it is not possible to understand the psychological evolution of Knyazev and others beside him.

"5.9.41. Day 76. We've begun having dinner in the Academy canteen, but now there are long queues there.

"The weather is cold and rainy... The flowers along my road to work have faded and withered, are at the end of their days. The sphinxes gleam, washed by the rain. A grey mist on the Neva conceals the clear outlines of St Isaac's, the Admiralty, the Winter Palace, the Senate and the horses above the archway of the General Staff. And somewhere, just a few tens of kilometres away, on the approaches to Leningrad, are the Germans... It's incredible, like a delirious dream, not real. How could it have happened? The Germans are at the gates of Leningrad.

"The superintendent of our house, sitting by the entrance, shares his impressions with me: 'If in the past we'd had the organisation we've got now, the Germans wouldn't be so close to Leningrad today.'

"7.9.41. Day 78. The stoics taught that the aim of life was wisdom and virtue. This can only be achieved by conquering passions and unwise inclinations, and by remaining firm in the face of the vicissitudes of fate...



Things from Georgi Knyazev's study.

True, the Greeks had another school of philosophy which believed that the purpose of life was happiness.

"Life is teaching us to stand unshakable in the face of the vicissitudes of fate. And at times I am a follower of this philosophy. But I am not a philosopher, not a thinker in the full sense of the word. I want to live happily. I find the dream of the other Greek thinkers—that of happiness—nearer to me.

"Happiness now? What cruel irony. Beggars can't be choosers. But to live for the sake of living, whatever happens, even prone on the earth, gasping one's last few breaths, is an even more terrible irony.

"It's Sunday today. I don't know what's going on in the world, in the environs of my city, in Leningrad itself. I don't feed on poisonous rumours, don't get any correspondence; I sit and read at random from the history of all times and peoples. And on every page, together with man's brilliance of thought and creativity, there is his blood, too, his blood and his agony.

"I live only by the minute, not even by the hour, not to mention the day. Fate presents me with another minute—I'm grateful to her. I read, I write, I think... And I do my best not to think of what may happen next.

"I came across a picture entitled 'Serene Old Age'. The illustration shows a very old man reading in peace and quiet. How ironical this seems in our modern hell!

"A different picture is more suited to our time. The great geometrician Archimedes was sitting and thinking over his drawings. The enemy had broken into the town where he lived, into his house. They halted for an

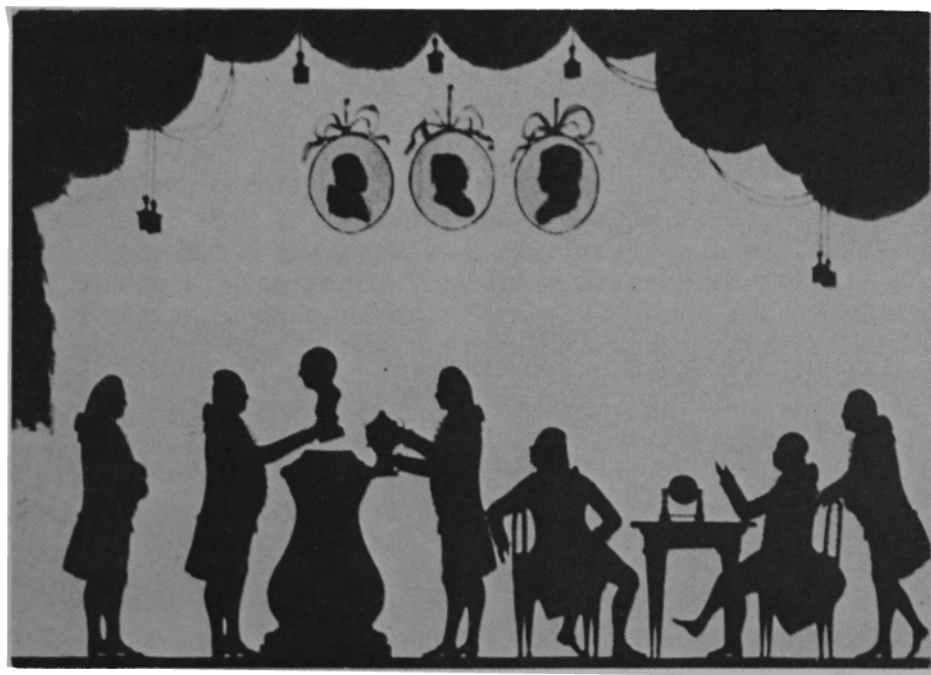


instant in surprise at seeing the old man's calm face, and a beautiful legend has it that, on seeing his drawings (not himself!) threatened with destruction, he said: 'Get off my diagram, you are spoiling it!' Archimedes, as we know, was killed by the Romans during the siege of Syracuse in 212 B.C."

THE FIRST BOMBING

At that time Yura Ryabinkin, who because of his youth had a more active, vigorous disposition, was devising plan after plan for the defence of Leningrad. His friends wanted to join the People's Volunteers. On this subject he remarked that knowing the insides of a rifle didn't help you fight tanks. Then he immediately corrected himself: "We can fight with rifles too!" And at once he produced one of his plans.

"Act in this way: Mine the whole of Leningrad, having sent all the population out into the forest, so that Leningrad's an empty city. Create panic in the city, etc. Not a single assistant to the Commander-in-Chief must know what the latter has in mind. The troops should be made to withdraw so that if they turn round they can occupy the most advan-



*Silhouettes of Russian academicians from Knyazev's study.
The work of Anting.*

tageous position for an attack. So the Germans already know that Leningrad's empty, all their spies say the same thing. The Germans will suspect cunning, thinking that the city might be mined, and will send in sappers and so on. Then the Commander-in-Chief will do what he alone has knowledge of. Immediately, like lightning, unexpectedly (even more so than the Germans on June 22nd) our tank units go over to a general offensive and squeeze the Germans into a knot. Then all the might of our artillery—which in the course of the retreat have occupied the most advantageous positions—is hurled at that knot. After half an hour of firing, the guns would move off several kilometres, and the places they had shelled would be occupied by our troops. All the aircraft massed above them would bomb the remnants of the enemy. And as soon as the enemy faltered, started to retreat, he would have to be pursued by air, land and sea. More and more troops would have to be sent in, so as not to allow them a moment's respite. The first lot of tanks would be replaced by fresh ones, the first batch would rest, then again take the place of the second, and so on. Only by such a blow can the Germans be broken. And then another thing: as soon as our tanks had reached a certain sector, part of them would go back, at an angle to their former course.

"But all this is impossible, it's a dream fantasy. There is no one to undertake such an offensive. And we have too few tanks. I think that Hitler probably counts on winning the war with spies, and, of course, with technology.

"The paratroopers at Ivanovskaya station have been wiped out. There still remain those at Mga. Every leader in the paper shouts out: We shall not surrender Leningrad! We shall defend it to the last! Reinforce our anti-tank defences! But for some reason our army has not won victory, nor are there enough weapons, in all probability. The militiamen in the streets, and even some of the People's Volunteers and regular soldiers are armed with Mausers of goodness knows what vintage. The Germans are lumbering forward with their tanks, and we are taught to fight them not with tanks but with bundles of grenades, and at times with bottles of fuel. That's how it is!"

We must not judge Yura with adult minds, and, what's more, with the logic of civilian life. It is boyish dreaming in which, of course, little heed is paid to reality. The main thing about his plan is the passionate, feverish desire to see everything change at once for the better.

Incidentally, a moment later Yura himself writes sadly that "all this is impossible, it's a dream fantasy".

He was 16, an age when both childish and adult features coexist in a person, vying with each other. He tried to fathom why the German fascist troops were near Leningrad, and the first thing that entered his head was spies!

Yura's plan for the defeat of the German armies near Leningrad, which he and the Commander-in-Chief could have carried out between them, was not the final flash of prewar childhood and prewar psychology. There would be other of the same nature—naive and sometimes absurd

ideas, not to mention manifestations of sheer childish egoism which was to give Yura's conscience quite a bit of trouble.

In a matter of a few days bombs would rain down on Leningrad. After that, ferocious, systematic artillery bombardment was to start. And the most horrible thing of all—hunger—would set in. Each individual had been approaching all this, each one had his own radius, his own share of the fate that befell Leningrad. A small radius compared with the whole front, a vast, infinite one if you probe the depths of the human spirit, the sufferings, hopes and losses.

"5th, 6th September. Nikitin and Finkelstein wanted to join the People's Volunteers, but they didn't go. They went to the school, and were given the job of painting the roof. They didn't agree, saying they had to go somewhere else. They promised to come back the next day, but didn't turn up.

"Again Mum wants to fix me up at the naval training school, but I don't want to go there. Anyway they're not going to take me. I haven't got very good eyesight, that's one thing, I've got pleural commisures of the right lung, that's another thing, and there are other troubles, too. Why indulge in optimistic hopes, only to receive bitter fruits later on?

"Leningrad's being shelled by German long-range artillery. We keep hearing the thunder of exploding bombs. Yesterday one fell on a house in Glazovskaya Street, and destroyed half the building. Finkelstein and Nikitin went to have a look, and told me about it. Somewhere a shell fell in a public garden, and there were a lot of dead and wounded. Towards evening today there was more shelling. And the crump of explosions is coming from somewhere in the direction of the Moscow Station, further away, beyond it. The women in the queues are saying that Hitler's promised to finish the war by September 7th, that is, by tomorrow. What ridiculous rumours! Not long ago they were saying just the same thing, only then the date was August 2nd.

"Yesterday I went to see Shtakelberg, but he wasn't in. When I got home, he appeared at my place. He's working in a military hospital, as an orderly receiving the wounded. We went to the exhibition of the patriotic war (in Pervaya Krasnoarmeiskaya Street). There are a lot of interesting things there. They've got a medium French tank, a light Czech one, then a 142 mm Howitzer and all sorts of German equipment. We were amused by one thing: a card like we have for the bread ration, with the words 'Imperial Department of Kissing'. On the coupons (presumably to be torn off in a brothel) it said: 'accidental kiss', 'fleeting kiss', 'coupon for (...) meeting' and so on. How shocking! On the walls there are posters, photographs, etc. There was an alarm while we were there, so we spent three hours at the exhibition. Shtakelberg told me about the German poison gases. Terrifying!

"It's now half-past nine. Leningrad's under fire from German long-range

* This part is unreadable, as the pages of the diary are damaged by fire and some places have been totally erased.



artillery. Powerful explosions make buildings and windows shudder.

"7th September. It's a day off for Mum. I had to do duty at the entrance from 12 midday to 4 p.m. I read Jack London's *Burning Daylight*.

"In the evening yesterday, the 6th, there was a real cannonade. The Germans were bombarding Leningrad with their heavy guns. Today it's quieter. There hasn't been an alarm, although the ack-ack guns have been going. Today's the 129th anniversary of the Battle of Borodino. A tremendous battle once took place outside Moscow between Russian and French troops. Over 108,000 people were killed or wounded that day. The foreign invaders then received a firm rebuff.

"8th September. A day of worry, anxiety, agitation. I'll tell everything in order.

"In the morning Mum came rushing back from work, saying she was being sent to work on a state farm at Orienbaum. She had to leave Ira and me on our own. She went to the district Soviet and they gave her a day's postponement. Afterwards we came to an agreement about the naval school. She went to the regional committee, and then on to the training school, while I popped in to see Finkelstein. They had quite a happening at school. The kids had been given the job of limewashing the floor of the attic. But there wasn't enough lime, and they decided to dilute it. In place of the lime, however, they added superphosphate. There was a reaction, and chlorine was given off. The kids had to walk about the attic in gas masks. Varfolomeyev arrived and went for them ('Is it all for nothing that I've been teaching you chemistry!'). Then David went off to hand in his bicycle to the army (three days ago there was a notice about the requisitioning of bicycles).

"Mum was already in when I got back home. She said they might accept me after all. But I'm very, very doubtful. Then Mum went off somewhere else.

"After that the most terrifying thing started.

"The alarm was sounded. I took no notice. But then I heard a noise in the courtyard. I looked out, glanced first down, then up and saw ... 12 Junkers. There were thunderous bomb explosions, deafening explosions one after another, but no rattling of windows. Evidently the bombs were falling a long way off, but they were extremely powerful. Ira and I ran downstairs. The explosions were continuing. I rushed back home, and on our landing saw Zagoskin's wife. She was also frightened and had run downstairs. We talked a bit, then Mum hurried in from somewhere, having forced her way through the streets. Soon the all-clear went. The result of the bombing was quite dreadful. Half the sky was blanketed with smoke. They had bombed the harbour, the Kirov Works and that part of the city in general. It grew dark. From the direction of the Kirov Works we saw a sea of flames. Bit by bit the glow died down. Smoke, smoke is everywhere, and even here we're aware of the acrid smell. It tickles the throat a bit.

"That's the first real bombing of Leningrad.

"Now night is falling, the night of the 8th. What will this night bring?

"Getting on for midnight.

"Ira had just gone to bed when another alarm was sounded. We quickly dressed and went down to the ground floor. At first a few anti-aircraft guns were firing, then we heard the whining sound of planes. All the while the searchlights were sweeping the sky. But not a single plane was brought down. Somewhere they were bombing again. All the residents of our house from the two bottom floors (excepting the cellars) were in the corridor on the ground floor. Time dragged endlessly. Then, in the courtyard of house No. 36, someone started beating a metal rail—a gong. We were frightened. Marusya, Lida and I put on our gas masks and went out into the yard to ask what was going on. The man on duty in the courtyard told us there had been no chemical alarm. We spent another 2 hours in a state of expectation. Finally we made up our minds and went home. The all-clear has not yet gone. The glow in the east has died down, but now and again German planes zoom overhead. They've been shot at but they're still circling and circling over the city. I don't know what to do next. Mum and Ira have gone to sleep with their clothes on. Maybe I'll do the same. I don't know. The fascists obviously want us, Leningraders, never to forget this week. Looks like they've not been able to take Leningrad from the land, and have therefore decided to destroy it from the air.

"9th September. I'm writing this at precisely midnight. During the day there have been eleven alarms! And what alarms! An hour or two each. The most terrible was the last one, at night. There was heavy bombing of the Oktyabrsky district. Bombs rained down on Krasnaya Street too, and on Theatre Square and Lieutenant Shmidt Bridge. An eyewitness came from over there covered in dirt—the earth was thrown about—and told the story.

"During an alarm in the daytime a plane was brought down over our

house. The pilot jumped out with his parachute right into the city. I don't know what happened to him. They probably caught him. I didn't go to the training school, or to school. The interval between raids was 10-15 minutes. Tomorrow, if everything's all right, Mum told me I should go to the training school. It seems to me that the doctors won't pass me. I won't get through the medical. In the communiqué they said that at 8.30 there'd been an air attack on Leningrad, but that no military objectives had been hit. But Mum said that a lot of food storehouses had been burnt down, and also the Vitebskaya freight station, a creamery and some residential buildings—how many isn't known.

"Everyone thinks that these raids on Leningrad are explained by the fact that Hitler hasn't had any luck with his plan for taking Leningrad with land forces. He got mad and ordered the bombing.

"No changes in the news from the fronts. We've retaken some town called Elno* ... and that's something.

"Yes, Leningrad won't have any respite now. They'll be bombing us every day.

"They want to put the family of some chief engineer of a trust in our flat. Pests! Mum wants to refuse pointblank.

"The siren. An hour's alarm. All clear. A break—ten minutes. Another alarm. This way you can utterly wear the population out. And in our house there isn't even a bomb shelter.

"Maybe I'll join the fire-fighting team at school. I'm pretty sure I won't get into the training school. I'm going to bed while it's quiet. But there's no telling what might happen next."

Georgi Knyazev had different experiences on that first day of bombing:

"8.9.41. As I was returning from work, along my small radius—the Neva embankment—I was aware of the irregular pulse of the city's life. The Nikolayevsky Bridge was raised. The only way across the river was by Palace Bridge. The usually deserted University Embankment has become a main highway. Before long there appeared between the upraised parts of the beautiful bridge a gunboat with two long-range guns. It was going upstream. The river was full of life. Military launches disturbed the leaden September Neva waters... Not far from the Palace Bridge the gunboat stopped and gave a prolonged whistle, a signal that it wanted to be allowed through faster.

"A squad of sailors in battle dress, with helmets strapped to their knapsacks, marched along the embankment. A car, entirely covered with mud, its glass broken, drove by. In the Rumyantsev Garden there were once again groups of Leningraders waiting to be sent off on labour conscription. Going off in buses somewhere were armed and unarmed workers...

"So suddenly my empty road bordered by flower-beds and bushes is full of life, like a river at high water...

"Incidentally, a few days ago the bushes have had a trim. Someone's

* This is Yura's idea of the name of the town of Yelnya, which he did not know.

looking after them even in these appalling times! It's somehow given me strength, raised my spirits.

"On Syezdovskaya Line there's a crowd of people round the barracks entrance. They're waiting to see the wounded who are accommodated there. Some are looking at the windows from which Red armymen and sailors with bandaged heads or arms peer out...

"At 7.30 in the evening, when I was resting, our whole house suddenly gave a shudder. We heard the ack-ack guns firing and also machine-guns. The first instant was horrific. But I immediately got myself in hand, overcoming the instinctive desire to get away, to run from danger... In the courtyard there was a crowd outside the bomb shelter. Kraush had brought her sick child there. Everyone was gazing at the sky. Neighbours came to say that from their south-facing windows they could see the glow of a huge fire and columns of thick smoke, which was spreading over the sky. True enough, when I went to see for myself, a fire was blazing on the other side of the Neva. It was even reflected in the water. Some people thought that German bombers had broken through and succeeded in setting fire to the oil storage tanks somewhere near Volkovo village.

"10.30. Another alarm. I went out onto the staircase. The searchlights were scanning the sky, ack-ack guns were firing. I went back home to my study and without taking off my coat, cap and galoshes continued to write beneath the hood of the green lamp... M.F. jokes: 'You're just like Archimedes.' The house is shaking, but not like it was a little while ago. I managed to ring work before the alarm sounded. All those on duty were at the ready. M.F. and I had supper. We gathered up our little bundles with things and money. M.F. went off to her first aid post.

"12.30. The alarm is still on. From time to time firing is heard from the ships on the Neva. My neighbours have not yet returned. They're still sitting on the steps at the bottom of the staircase. Tonight it looks as if the whole of Leningrad will be kept awake.

"So, on the 79th day the bombing of Leningrad began. Most likely, there are many such days and nights of anxiety ahead. We shall have to drain the cup of ordeals to the dregs, a bitter cup."

The bombing of Leningrad had started. One in two of those from whom we obtained oral stories spoke of the fire at the Badayevsky Stores, regardless of whether they were close to it or far away.

But now we read the diary of Georgi Knyazev, a detailed, daily account, and there's nothing there about it: "Somewhere near Volkovo village" the Germans had "succeeded in setting fire to the oil storage tanks" ... And on September 9th and 10th, although he records the bombing, the man's imagination is struck by trifles (compared with the stores and their significance). However, these trifles also contain a sinister symbolism, the irony of war.

"10.9.41. Day 81. It turns out there were casualties in yesterday's evening raid too. The vultures bombed the Zoological Gardens again.

Killed an elephant. According to one account it was injured by blast, according to another it was wounded by a bomb-splinter, was suffering badly and had to be shot. Two evenings running the unfortunate Zoo has endured all the horrors of a real hell."

So we find nothing in Knyazev's entries about the Badayevsky Stores. True, his was a small radius, true, he tried not to "perpetuate rumours". But the destruction of the warehouses, with the flames filling the sky—a sight that everybody claimed to have seen, did not produce at the time the impression conveyed in retrospect, in reminiscences.

The threat of a direct attack on the city was too grave, and it prevented people from thinking about far-reaching consequences and events.

In present-day recollections there is a different angle of vision. Those who remember have already passed through that horrible famine; for months and years they were tormented by regrets, by the memory of bread that had not been stocked up, of the sugar and the cereal that was destroyed, and so it seems to them that on the very first day they already felt, realised the significance of those fires. And yet this is not found in the diaries. In them there is no selection of events as if from the future. They are, so to say, without a historical view. But in them is the psychology of that time, the view of war with the eyes of those days, and in this sense the diaries do have a historical perspective...

Not only the Badayevsky Stores were burned down, but their neighbours, as well—the creamery, whose stocks were also of major significance for blockaded Leningrad. *Nina Khatkina* is even convinced that the smoke

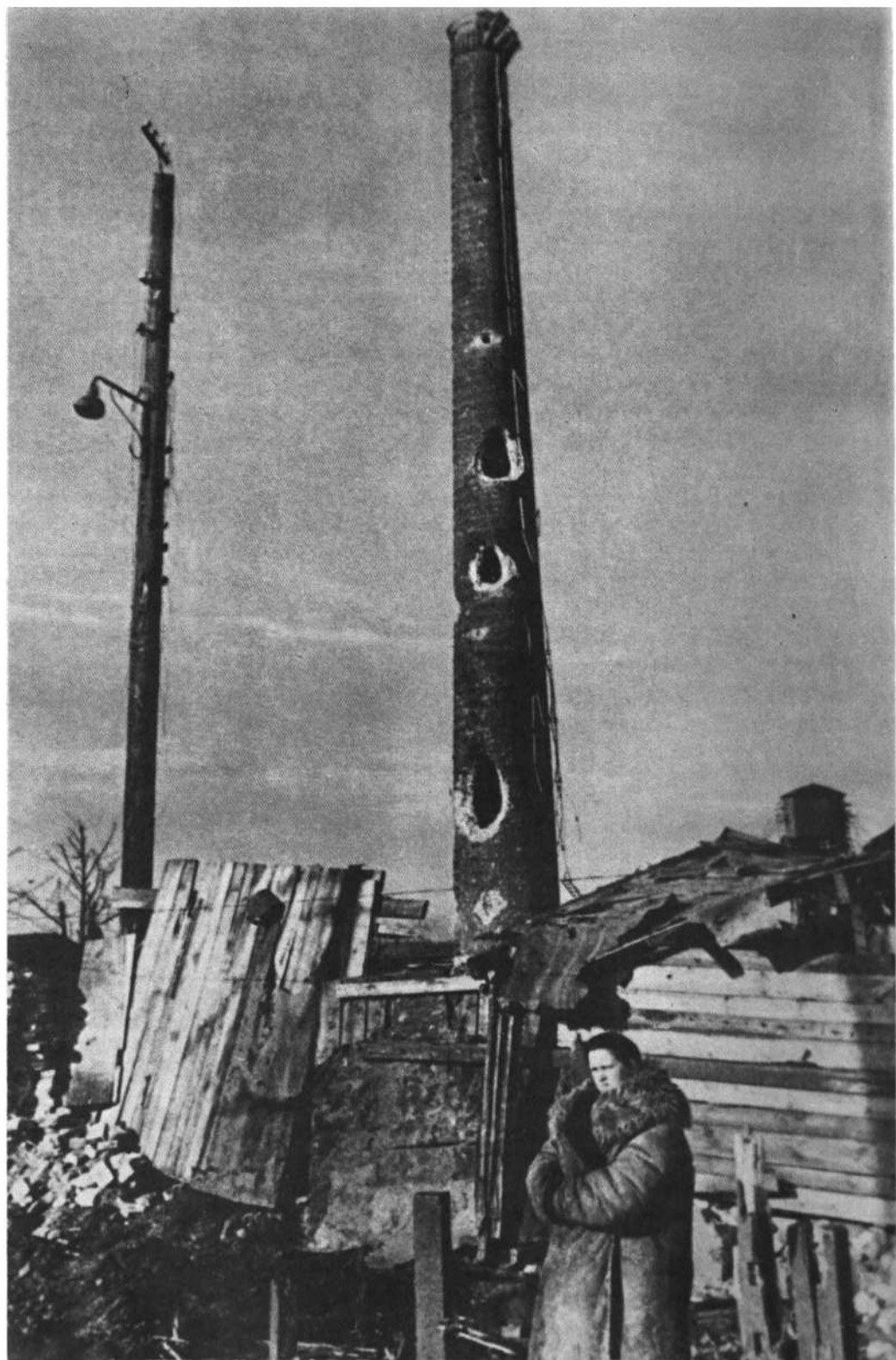


seen by the whole of Leningrad was from her factory. In those days many considered their own particular "radius" especially alarming and significant. And they could have easily failed to notice the main thing. But what Nina Khatkina remembers really did play a role in the tragedy and the salvation of Leningrad.

"I had just graduated from college as an engineer-technologist. I was sent (at that time the all-Union National Economic Council allocated student jobs) to Leningrad. Because my diploma work was on 'The Margarine Factory', and they were at the time building a margarine factory here. One had already been built in Moscow, and the second was under construction in Leningrad. So they sent me here...

"Once, in tsarist times, there was a factory here concerned mainly with the processing of Russian flax. Linseed oil was processed to produce varnish. They were producing a lot when I came to work here—10,000 tonnes a year they were making of that natural varnish. It was necessary to expand the raw material base and we began to receive sunflower seed and other oil crops... We had a very businesslike man who travelled round the Soviet Union and sent us back all kinds of oil-bearing crops. And so when someone from Moscow proposed that we undertake the processing of coconuts purchased from Americans in the Philippines, our people readily agreed, for that meant the full use of our capacity. They bought them, transported them to Vladivostok, and from there the coconuts came to us by train... We were considered to be the leaders in our field, were believed to have suitable cadres and to be able to cope with a completely new crop. We had to readjust the machinery, to carry out a series of tests, and only then were we able to process those coconuts.

"They brought us 2,000 tonnes. We received them, stored them away, and started work—and that's how far we'd got when the war caught us. Well, about the first day of the air attack on Leningrad—I believe some people don't remember it, some have forgotten, some don't know precisely how it all happened. But I remember, because I was in the very thick of things. I remember we were living on the premises by then, at the time the first raid took place... I don't know how much was dropped on the Badayevsky Stores, but as far as our factory is concerned, I know more or less exactly, because all the 'tails' from the bombs, all the stabilisers, were brought to me. Well, from inexperience we rushed to extinguish anything we saw fall on the roof (it was a timber roof), in the shops, on the heaps of coal then used to fuel the boiler, or simply in the grounds. But those that penetrated the bales of coconuts, of course, we did not see, or perhaps whoever was on duty by those stores was not very observant—I don't really know, but we only saw it when all these bales, containing a vast quantity of dry, oily nuts (70 per cent fat, 2 per cent moisture), when it had all started burning in a bonfire that could be seen from Krestovsky Island. As far as that fire, we were absolutely inexperienced, as I've already told you. I was one of three in the factory with a gun—you see, I don't even know the proper name for it—it was a rifle. This, I have to say, is a black mark in my biography, because the moment we heard



that planes were flying over our factory we all rushed to put out incendiaries, and I placed my rifle somewhere in a corner, and it vanished! Just imagine! ”

“Can you tell us how you extinguished the fire in the oilcake?”

“Yes, the oilcake... The stores were on fire, the copra was burning. It was, of course, the first to catch fire. We had one row of stores with copra, another row containing copra, and between them a building in which lay 800 tonnes of oilcake. Towards the end, when it was clear that we could do nothing about the copra, we decided to save at least this store of oilcake. It was our director, Vasily Trofimovsky, a very good man, who was primarily responsible for its being extinguished. I also took a hose away from a fireman (because he kept ducking away from that fire, the fire was unimaginable), and I was all the while hosing the stores, hosing down the director when his coat started to smoke. There was also one of our workers, and a good chap, too, who stood on the roof pouring water on the stores. Someone was bringing water for us. That was how we fought this element.”

“Was the oilcake later used to add to bread?”

“Where did that oilcake go? I’m afraid I can’t say exactly. There was no use for it at all in our factory. The neighbouring bread-baking plant took it—it was the No. 12 plant (across the fence from us), and that’s where we sent the oilcake. Subsequently it was issued as it was, and that was how it was used by citizens, including ourselves. It was probably what saved us from starvation, for we used to chop it up, and it was the principal nourishment we had. We used to fry it, make little round cakes, and so that was how we lived. Of course it wasn’t only the oilcake that saved us. After all, we were an oil-processing plant. We were able to fry this oilcake in some fat or other, and so we didn’t have anyone who died of starvation.”

“And you sent this fat to the army?”

“Yes, we were the main suppliers of fats to the Leningrad Front, and everything we had, everything that was processed into fat—as long as there was electricity—all this was sent to the army of the Leningrad Front. Later, after an interval, we resumed production of fat for the army. That was an interval of about three months. Then, when they’d laid a cable across the bottom of Lake Ladoga from the Volkhov hydro-electric station and begun supplying us, if very scarcely, with electricity, we got several shops back in production—the ones that did not use too much energy. Those with a high electricity consumption were not back in production until the war was over, but the others were working. But they only operated either before the electricity supply was suspended—up to January 6th 1942—or after a three months’ break. For those three months everything in Leningrad was at a standstill. Those were dreadful days—days of complete gloom, absolute, nightmarish silence, and death on a huge scale...”

We asked Nina Khatkina only about work. Her evidence related to a very important object, the fate of which we had neither heard nor read

about. Her account most probably, holds the explanation for that renowned smoke, the scene of that terrible fire which entered into all the stories told by Leningraders.

We confined ourselves exclusively to this story. We did not ask Nina Khatkina anything about her personal losses, or her family. On the wall was a portrait of a young man. Who was he? That modest but long inhabited room with its old furniture and things well familiar to their mistress—what had it seen, what had Nina Khatkina's life been like in 1943-44? We didn't even enquire about this, because we felt, we knew that for the book we only needed this piece. We were experienced, and we restricted ourselves. It was a necessity, perhaps honesty before Nina Khatkina, but it was also cruelty. A tactful person, she did not impose her own reminiscences upon us, stories about herself, which might also have been important and valuable. For a long time we recalled that sense of something left unsaid, that room in the house near the Lenin Stadium. There were quite a few of these incomplete stories—neither told nor heard out to the end—and from them bitterness built up, together with a feeling of guilt with regard to people whose memories we had so mercilessly disturbed...

But let us return to Georgi Knyazev's daily entries.

"16.9.41. Day 87. Everything in due order.

"In the morning I saw detachments of armed sailors on the embankment. They were going into the entrances of residential buildings. Opposite our house, on the Neva, they've been unloading a military transport. It turned out that in the windows of houses overlooking the Neva they're installing machine-gun emplacements. The sailors have gone into our house, too, in order to install machine guns in the Karpinsky, Shcherbatsky, Pavlova and other flats. Quite young sailors, evidently students, clean and spruce, went up the dim staircase carrying sandbags. At the entrance there was a whole guard ranged up...

"I came back home. What's to be done?

"The house is being transformed into a fort, or a well-entrenched firing point. Should we remain here? It helps, of course, that our windows overlook the courtyard. I'm not worried about now, of course, but during a battle? And where is the enemy? Far away, or near? The sailors worked very fast, not walking from place to place, but running. M.F. and I decided to move to the Archives for the time being. If we've got to die, let it be at our post, and not on some staircase or in a bomb shelter. We got together necessities, a camp bed, and I went off to work.

"By the Academy of Arts I was astonished to see the sailors digging holes at short distances from one another, putting something in them, laying bricks on top and sprinkling sand over them... Right opposite the sphinxes. Could it mean... My heart missed a beat.

"Lashing rain all day long. A September wind is blowing. Somewhere far away the artillery is barking. Despite the non-flying weather, the hum of our planes is a frequent sound. The entire city is bristling with bayonets, machine-guns, firing points, and anti-tank traps. In some streets, at the approaches to the city, barricades are being erected. Leningrad is preparing for battles in the streets, the squares, the houses. What shall we



be witness to? The most onerous days and hours are at hand...

"Night. I'm sitting in my office at the Archives. M.F. is with me. She's asleep on my camp bed. Silence. A dimmed lamp burns, casting light only on this piece of paper. Against the white background of the wall the silhouette of Lenin's bust stands out black in the corner. Did I ever dream that some time I would have to spend the night in this comfortable office in such extraordinary circumstances! I listen to the silence, there's no alarm to be heard. Of my watch there are two sleeping in the reading room and one awake in the room where the telephone is. Outside it's black night. The rain, it seems, has eased off. But it's cold and depressing.

"Belyavsky showed me a letter he picked up in Zelenin Street outside a devastated house. Blast had swept someone's correspondence and the pages of a manuscript into the street... Is that what's going to happen to my pages, too?

"'Tell me,' Belyavsky said to me, 'can it really be that no one is keeping notes these days on what's happening in the city, how people are standing up to events? How good it would be to organise such a record, to release the writer from other obligations—to authorise him to go about the streets, into institutions, houses... Couldn't the Literary Institute do that, for instance?' 'No,' I replied, 'that doesn't come within its functions. The Institute has historians, literary scholars, and not writers or chroniclers...'

"I didn't let slip a single word to indicate that I, for one, to the extent of my powers and the time I have, am keeping such a record. True, mine is confined to a very small radius and to a small number of meetings and events. But somebody is probably recording events and experiences on a significantly larger radius."

DIARIES, DIARIES...

Georgi Knyazev rightly guessed that other Leningraders, too, were recording, could not fail to be recording, what was happening in Leningrad, in the country, in the world, what was happening to themselves. Perhaps someone with a wider radius, someone not confined to home and work, to a short section of the Neva Embankment... Knyazev blames himself for the "narrowness" of his notes, puts forward justification to the possible reader, to his "distant friend". And where he could, he extended his radius, introducing reports from newspapers and books. To us, his "distant friends", it is very clear that the power of his notes is precisely that they are anchored in a specific radius.

Yura Ryabinkin and Lydia Okhapkina each had an even smaller radius—they wrote about themselves and their lives. Lev Tolstoy expressed a great truth when he said that when a man digs deep into himself, what he discovers is of general import! The main thing is not the breadth encompassed but the depth of penetration. And to the diaries and notes of those years that observation has a direct, even special relevance. This accounts for the universal human power these apparently personal testaments of a blockade mother and a blockade boy have today, these testaments of people who came to know themselves and others, discovering prematurely the depths and the heights of the human existence...

Lydia Okhapkina has the most detailed and frightful recollections of the air raid on September 8th, 1941.

"It was September 8th, 1941. When I heard the alarm I rushed to the shelter, but didn't get that far, and took refuge in the entrance of a stone building. I stood there quaking with fear. A woman invited me into her flat. She lived on the first floor. We'd just got upstairs and in the door when we heard a deafening explosion, with an incredible crash and crackling of fire. We were all deafened by the roar of engines. We heard bombs exploding somewhere near by. The air, everything around, was crackling, booming. Our house was shaking, through and through. The earth, too, seemed to be seized with convulsions, as in an earthquake. My teeth were chattering from fear, my knees were shaking. I squashed myself into a corner, and pressed the children to me. They were crying with fear. I had the feeling there were moments when I was about to lose consciousness. I thought that this was the end, that now a bomb would fall on us and we'd all be killed. We stood there like people condemned to die. The woman who'd invited us in stood open-mouthed, her eyes dilated, whispering something. Her mother, an old woman, fell to her knees and crossed herself. The woman's children, a little older than mine, were also crying. We lived in Volkov Prospekt, not far from the railway and very near to the frontline. It was therefore far more dangerous than, say, on Vasilievsky Island, or on the Vyborg side, and generally on the other side of the Neva. That raid continued a long time. I already thought that we would never survive it. That night saw the appearance of my first grey hairs.

"I decided that we couldn't go on living there, especially as houses close to ours were flattened during that night. In the morning the ruins were smoking. Beams stuck out like huge crosses above the people buried underneath.

"...I travelled to Petrogradskaya Street to see Shura's wife, Inna, who lived near Kirov Prospekt. She, too, had a little girl. I thought we would understand each other better, and besides, she lived on the ground floor, and then that was more convenient, safer. When I arrived there, I told her about everything. She agreed—only in order to stay there at night we needed to get permission from the militia. I had to wait a long time at the station.

"I stayed with Inna only two days. Her mother came up from the country, it got very crowded, and her mother wasn't at all pleased, so I went back home to Volkovo village.

"Almost all the people in our house had gone away—some evacuated from Leningrad, while some others moved to relatives or friends in the centre of the city. The roof had been destroyed by fire, and no one was living upstairs by then. I lived on the ground floor. There were still two families there. I lived in fear for the children, and like one condemned to die. I expected death every time there was an air raid. But one day a commission came from the district Soviet and proposed that we move to another district. They said that in the morning the trams would come and take all of us living in Volkovo elsewhere. They took us to Vasilievsky Island, where later on, through the Military Department, the district Soviet allocated me a room, a narrow one of 8-9 square metres, in the 1st Line, on the second floor, where I subsequently lived with the children. That was 20th-23rd September. The alarms and the air raids continued, and the children and I would run to the basement, where a bomb shelter had been set up. But later on I stopped going there, for I was by then convinced that if there was a direct hit, we wouldn't survive, anyway. Then the warnings generally started in the evenings, between 8 and 10 o'clock, when the children were already asleep and it was difficult to make them get up. Tolya slept in his clothes, as I did, even in his winter coat and boots. It was hard to make him get up. Once I woke him so that we could dash to the shelter. He'd just gone to sleep and didn't want to get up. Through his tears he said: 'I'm not going, let them kill me when I'm asleep, it won't hurt. I don't want to go, I don't want to go anywhere.' It was unbearable to listen to... From that time on I stopped going to the basement.

"...It seemed ages since I last washed the children. The bath-houses were open only at long intervals. And because of the alarms it was dangerous to go there. I decided to bathe them at home. When I undressed Tolya I saw that his body was covered in sores and bore scratch marks. He had scabies which he'd picked up while he was away. I went to the chemist's. They didn't have ointment for scabies and let me have some antiseptic instead. But before applying the antiseptic it was essential to wash him in as hot water as possible. Once when I was doing this—it was getting on towards night—he was standing naked in a round basin, and I was washing him with water so hot I could hardly bear to put my

hands in it. He screamed. Suddenly the air raid warning went. Immediately a burning flare came sailing through our window. The old carpet covering the window fell down. The window panes were smashed to smithereens. It all happened in an instant. And outside I heard deafening explosions. The children started to cry loudly. First I grabbed Tolya, bare and wet, and almost flung him onto the floor in the corridor. Then I ran back for my daughter. I pressed them to me in a corner in the corridor, wondering when all this was going to stop. 'Beasts, bastards!' I cursed the Germans. In the morning, when I went to get bread, I saw that half the house opposite had been destroyed, while in the other, which had survived, the walls were covered with a variety of wallpaper—pink, blue and green, with flowers and stripes. And what was very strange—in one square of the wall a big clock was still hanging—and still going."

All the same, Lydia Okhapkina continued bathing Tolya and applying the antiseptic every evening, and she cured him, although every time the moment for the bath approached she became very nervous...

A comparatively large number of Leningraders began to keep diaries. It may well be that the same thing happened at the beginning of the war in other frontline cities—we don't know. But in Leningrad it is worthy of notice. During the first few days of the war, *Faina Prusova*, a worker at the Sofia Perovskaya Hospital, gave her son, a medical student, a thick exercise book and asked him to write down everything that happened to himself and other people. And she, too, started to keep a war diary. Both these diaries, the mother's and the son's, have been preserved. Surprisingly many of the diaries survived, although, of course, only a small proportion of the total number.

How many of those diaries, initially careful, painstaking records, with time lost their character with the approach of darkness, hunger, cold and death! What might have seemed to be an easy task—writing—was now becoming an intolerable labour, heroism of the human spirit. And how many of those entries were dispersed by explosions, burnt in blockade fires, or lost after the war—some in Leningrad itself, others in evacuation to distant places. *Maria Tkacheva* preserved the diary of an unknown Leningrader, which had been copied out by her aunt and was brought by herself to Leningrad from Yaroslavl. At the end of it is this inscription: "These exercise books were found in a desk in an office in Yaroslavl. A male employee found them and carelessly tossed them aside. A woman on the staff then came across the exercise books and, after taking a quick look, found that they were the diaries of a woman who had been through that hungry winter of 1941 in Leningrad, and took them home. On reading them she discovered that the writer was the relative of close acquaintances of hers. On enquiry, she found that the office occupied a building which had formerly housed a hospital for evacuees, in which the keeper of the diary had died."

Yura Ryabinkin's diary, a scorched thick exercise book, fell into the hands of a thoughtful nurse, R.I. Trifonova, and so was saved.

Here, too, there had to be rescuers.

Some Leningraders began to write, to record their experiences immediately after they had broken out of the blockade. Or soon after the war—"when the trail was still hot". The typewritten copy of "Notes on the Blockade of Leningrad", by *L.D. Baranova*, bore the following inscription: "At the insistence of my lifelong friend, Nadezhda Rozanova-Vereshchagina, these notes were made in 1942-43 on my arrival in Moscow from besieged Leningrad."

T.V. Ryabinina added notes from memory to her small blockade diary, making a strict division between the two. She also explains why her diary is so brief and incomplete:

"I am sorry now that I wrote so briefly, but that to a considerable degree was due to the fact that one could not write in detail. There were dozens of posters and appeals exhorting us to be vigilant, and also to be steadfast, courageous and united. On all the walls there were slogans, caricatures and posters. There was Kirill, 'heir to the Russian throne' in the form of a crowned monkey, and the philistine, a rumour-monger with immense ears, and the worker, calling upon all not to yield in the face of hardships, the woman who was now expected to replace the man in production—it's impossible to list them all. There were masses of leaflets which were put up in blocks of flats or in entrances, or distributed by local housing offices. People read them, and read them very attentively, and they undoubtedly played a great role...

"The need for vigilance and caution was dinned into us at every step. In the streets patrols made frequent checks of documents, and you couldn't go out without a passport for at any moment you could be stopped and asked to produce it. You weren't allowed to point out the way to any 'objectives'—any factories, bridges, etc., or to listen to or pass on any information about buildings which had been damaged, numbers of victims, or sites where bombs had fallen, as all that would have given the enemy some reference points. Asking the question 'How do I get to so-and-so?' would bring the answer 'I don't know', along with a suspicious look. I myself used to answer, 'I don't know' if anyone who was a stranger to me asked the most harmless question. We became particularly wary after two saboteurs were caught with the aid of tracker dogs just a few steps away from our house. They had been hiding in a boarded-up kiosk where they used to buy scrap from the population. We owed our first bomb to them, the one that fell on house No. 4/3 on September 8, they were the ones who had signalled with those beautiful green rockets which we had so stupidly admired on the first night of bombing*. They spent a couple of weeks in the kiosk, and during that time the bombs often fell in the neighbourhood. I did not see them being flushed out, but I saw the crowd following them when they were taken away. An unblacked-out window brought forth a storm of abuse and suspicion."

* Stories of people signalling with rockets, were rumours typical of those days, sometimes tremendously exaggerated rumours, which was understandable in view of the situation. On many occasions, however, when we tried to check on details, it turned out that the incident was not confirmed.

So T.V. Ryabinina had to fill out her wartime entries from memory—at the beginning of the fifties.

Some of the other blockade survivors also returned to their diary entries later on. For example, Faina Prusova's diary was in duplicate. She herself copied out her diary from separate scraps of paper into an exercise book in 1951. She made a copy for Dima (her grandson), taking particular grandmotherly pains over it: adding photographs, newspaper cuttings, photocopies of blockade-time pictures of her son Boris, and so on.

In Olga Bergholtz's papers there is a thick file entitled "Extracts from Diaries". In it are typed extracts from blockade diaries kept by people from all walks of life—teachers, party officials, workers for local Soviets, doctors, and drivers. She was collecting authentic documents of those years for her book *Stars in the Day*—messages from sanitary and other squads carrying out essential everyday chores, reports from district Komsomol committees, newspaper cuttings etc., and also making extracts from diaries. Where the diaries themselves are is not known. But it is interesting to see what a lot of them were available to her in those early postwar years. Even we, after thirty years, had access to quite a lot of diaries. The material selected by Olga Bergholtz really is impressive, and we take the liberty of quoting some of them (with the permission of Olga Bergholtz's sister, Maria Fyodorovna).

Here is an extract from the diary of *K.V. Polzikova-Rubets**, deputy head at secondary school No. 239.

"11.11.41. The bomb shelters have become so much a part of everyday reality that many people cannot now imagine the city without them. An old woman in a queue: 'They bombed a nobleman's house in Fontanka. No one lives there now, and there weren't any flats there in the past. Just one nobleman used to live there, a count. My Dad was his senior yardkeeper. The yardkeeper's lodge was good and light. And I remember as if it was yesterday—on the left were the stables and the carriage shed, and on the right the cellar. But where the bomb shelter was, I can't remember after all, I was only a little girl then.' There was general laughter in the queue but it still didn't penetrate the old woman's head that there had been no bombs then, and no bomb shelters.

"28.11.41. I'd like to write about the most beautiful and most sinister spectacle we saw one October evening. I was visiting Lur's and Mur's. The siren wailed and Lur insisted that we must go to the bomb shelter. Mur vanished to the HQ and Lur was sitting there with me. Then he went out into the street, returned and said 'they've dropped incendiaries in the vicinity of the Nardom'. The all-clear went after an hour, and we went out onto the embankment. There it was so light that you could have read a newspaper. The Big Dipper was lit up brightly, as if with electricity. In some places it was illuminated so brilliantly, that you could see the rails on which the little cars used to run. The Dipper towered against the background of a dark red sea of fire. The flames extended over a wider area.

* We received K.V. Polzikova-Rubets' diary complete.

and above this gigantic bonfire hung a dark pall of smoke. Sometimes you could see the jets from the firehoses, but they did not seem to have any effect. The Neva was glittering all over, reflecting the blood-red fire at one moment, and the next, dazzling white. The fortress and the Tomanovskaya Exchange were beautiful, so beautiful that they outshone anything seen in any holiday fireworks. All these bridges were visible, down to the minutest detail. It was a spectacle that was unforgettable in its fearsome beauty—and fearsome really is the right word, for fear-inspiring it was. There was something in it that made one think of Bryullov's 'The Death of Pompeii'...

Let us return, however, to Georgi Knyazev's small radius. On September 19 he writes:

"I don't understand what is going on. On the 15th I had the impression that the Germans were expected to appear in the city streets any minute. I went to spend the night at the Archives in order to share its fate. The next day I cheered up. Everyone said that the enemy had been chased off, our planes had been reinforced and that the blockade was being broken from outside. On the 18th that illusion was put paid to by an hour's furious shelling of the city...

"21.9.41. Day 92. Three months of war. For us Leningraders the last, 13th, week has been the most dreadful one. I now recall separate episodes and if I hadn't kept a diary I would not be able to reconstruct in my memory exactly what happened and when. There are moments which seem impressed in the mind as if by branding-iron, yet exactly when they occurred in the overall sequence of events, it is not always possible to determine immediately. Here are those key moments that made the greatest impression on me. The fire in the Senate building, the 'jump' made by our house when two bombs fell, the whine of artillery shells over the Archives, the dark bust of Lenin against the background of a slightly illuminated wall in my room at work while I was spending the night there... Shakhmatova's glance, intense, silent, but full of inner strength as a shell fell almost hitting her; the sailors, rushing into buildings in order to set up gun emplacements, and a lot more. All these are impressions of the last week. They are numerous, and how strangely arranged in the brain—not in chronological order but in some freakish sequence.

"What is happening? No one has a clear idea of things. The enemy is at the gates. Somewhere nearby. But where? People exchange worried looks, but rarely ask any questions. In the press there are tremendous numbers of such slogans as: 'Strengthen all the approaches to Leningrad. Every entrance to the city, every square, street and lane must become a bastion, a fortress, made inaccessible to the enemy...', 'Let's build fortifications the enemy cannot breach...', 'Leningraders have a single task—to defend the city and rout the enemy...', 'Bar all ways into the city to the enemy!', 'Death must await the enemy at every step, and destruction, his arms and equipment'. The newspapers are full of extracts from the works of Lenin



The courtyard of Georgi Knyazev's house.

and other authors on how to wage a civilian war, how to build barricades.

"But the blockade can only be lifted from outside, and if that doesn't happen, then the only thing left is to die in defence of our city... The old workers from the Obukhov Works have declared: 'We have only one choice: victory or death, freedom or slavery! Not one step back...'

"Fearlessness and daring in the face of death is extolled as the example to follow, cowardice and faintheartedness lashed. 'Death cannot thus be avoided. It will come all the same, but a shameful death, to the jeers and mockery of guards and butchers...' The newspapers quote this from a speech given by General Cluseret of the Paris Commune...

"So the exaltation of heroic death is the slogan of this time. If we are not victorious we shall die...

"There is nowhere to retreat!

"An interesting talk with a professor of mathematics, an expert on the law of probability, is being passed round by word of mouth. Each Leningrader has a one in three million chance of being killed or wounded. An absolutely negligible figure, which can calmly be ignored. But then there was only one elephant in Leningrad, and it was precisely that elephant that was killed during the bombing of the city! There's the theory of probability for you in the proportions of 1:3,000,000 and 1:1...

"The papers are full of reports of nazi atrocities. If one were to collect these and assemble them in some sort of order it would be more horrifying than any story one could invent.

"22.9.41. Day 93. My dear distant friend, do you need to know what I now read sometimes?.. If I should lose M.F., see the devastation and

defeat of my city, the destruction of the Archives entrusted to my keeping, what would there be for me to live for? But how shall I part with life if I am not killed? It seems that the easiest way is strangulation—not a beautiful end but a reliable one. I have just taken the encyclopedia, and I read: ‘The rope, tightening as a result of the body’s weight, usually lies higher than the thyroid cartilage and, exerting pressure back and front, simultaneously with the closure of the windpipe, squeezes the large blood vessels of the neck and the pneumogastric nerve. As a result, complete loss of consciousness follows, either immediately or in a few seconds, from the stoppage of the brain’s blood circulation...’ That’s a matter for the future, and meanwhile I am not losing either presence of mind or courage. I shall fully carry out my duty as a citizen at my responsible post.”

At that same time Yura Ryabinkin was faced with an equally burning problem, one which, unfortunately, we cannot properly understand, as he was afraid to unburden his heart even in his diary. It’s a problem involving both childish and adolescent feelings, real and trifling sentiments. Here we see the character of this boy, not at all a model of perfection, a boy with his own enthusiasms, his own fantasies, his own queer notions, at times too demanding, too changeable, too touchy, too proud. Much was breaking down, taking shape in that as yet immature character. He was developing fast. If you look carefully into some of his entries it can be seen that development was not taking place in response to events, these do not in themselves make people cleverer. The reason was that Yura was thinking—both about what was going on around him, and about what was taking place within himself. He watched himself, made demands on himself. Noteworthy in this respect is an apparently minor story about card-playing. Yura played cards with boyish enthusiasm until he suddenly noticed that he was playing with increasing excitement. He examined this new, dangerous emotion and found a gambler within himself. So he stopped playing. Cards, the war, the blockade, money—they were all there, side by side, in cruel authenticity. The teenagers hung about at school, not knowing what to do with themselves. Classes had not yet started, these were critical days in the battle on the approaches to Leningrad—15th-18th September 1941. The town of Pushkin fell, German units were approaching Pulkovo Hill; the city’s fate was being decided within a matter of hours, decided by individual companies, battalions, and batteries... One of the two authors had to traverse the entire retreat route during those days—the surrender of Pushkin, the retreat under bombing, past Shushary, past Pulkovo, towards Leningrad, towards Srednyaya Rogatka... It seemed then that the enemy would break through into the city at any moment, and street fighting would begin.

“15th September. This morning I decided I wouldn’t go to the training school. I shan’t write down the reason here. You can’t imagine what that decision has cost me. I still have tears in my eyes, but all the time I’ve

been putting off making a final decision. Now it's final. Although I have my doubts. After all, it's such a blow to Mum! All the same, I know the decision's the right one.

"When I told Mum about it, she started probing for the reason. I decided to keep my mouth shut. But didn't succeed. Then I had to think up an excuse. To the effect that I didn't like the school, that's all. Immediately there flashed into her head the foolish suspicion that I might be afraid of being sent to the front.

"I can see very clearly the threat I'm under. Too clearly. But I can see very well what I'm doing to Mum acting like this. And I can't decide whether to sacrifice myself for her sake or to stick to my decision. There are two ways out, but of those I have to choose one.

"It's hard, agonising to say goodbye to your dream... But what's to be done? I shall take a cynical attitude to it, perhaps some good will come of it.

"I shan't put my trust in any more 'perhapses' in my life. I did that once before. I'm writing this diary for myself, and here I can say everything—once I picked up lice. I was studying at school then. And our class was summoned to go to the doctor for a check to see if we had lice. Like an idiot I went. I hoped that 'perhaps' they wouldn't notice. Well, they found them. What a disgrace it was! And all because of what? Because of my silly hope that 'perhaps'... I should have avoided going for the check, should have slipped away.

"What am I to occupy myself with now? What to do with myself? Go to work in a factory? Join the fire-fighting team at school? To remain as I am?

"There appear to be three choices for me. I think I'll go through the subjects for the ninth year on my own. I'll make every effort and study. I'll take the exams after the war and go up into the tenth grade. That seems best. But then I'm not sure. None of us will survive this war. Now it's just buds, no one's seen the flowers. And suppose the Germans use poison gas or bacteria?

"Oh well, it's all the same. Before us there were thousands of millions of people, and people will live after us... Somebody has to be unlucky in life.

"It's still only one p.m.

"Today I've been to see Mum again. We came back home together. We went to the stoker to spend the night. This evening two letters came from Tina. She writes to say that her evacuation post is moving, going off in some unknown direction.

"Mum says that paratroopers have been shelling Leningrad, and that our sailors have made short work of them. I don't really believe that. Rumour has it that Pulkovo is changing from hand to hand and that the Germans are there at the moment. Ligovo's also been taken. According to the papers Kremenchug's been captured, which means the Germans have crossed the Dnieper. Oh, how badly things are going for us! People have arrived at the regional party committee to report that the port is badly damaged as a result of nazi air raids.

"Wherever you look over Leningrad now you see fighter planes. There

are too many of them to count in a day.

"The alarm is always late. First you hear the ack-ack guns going, then in about a minute and a half the siren goes.

"I haven't been to the cinema for a long time. Of course it's essential to see 'Newsreel from the Front' and some feature film. I've begun to write again out of grief. An interesting detail—the busier I am, the less I write in my diary.

"16th September. Today I've done an awful thing—I've lost 30!! roubles. 30!! roubles. Mum gave them to me to get sunflower seed oil (she hadn't anything smaller), and I lost them... I've been down in the mouth over that all day. We were pretty broke anyway, and then I go and lose all those roubles!

"The weather's bad, too. It's rainy and overcast. But there've been three alarms already today. Now it's 4.30. I went to see Mum at work. They're in a great flurry there—destroying all the papers. Absolutely all of them. On top of that Mum made me even more panicky—told me to examine the gas masks and see they were in order.

"It's 4.30. Once again we can hear near our house loud sounds of artillery shells bursting. According to V. Nikitin the Germans are 15 kilometres from Leningrad. I think they're closer.

"In the evening Bushueva, from Sosnovaya Polyana, came to see Mum. She told stories of all kind of horrors. Volodar station's occupied by the Germans. There's also some good news. For example, in and around Leningrad there are about two million troops concentrated, and about 1,000 planes have come from America and Britain. Now there are fighter planes flying over the city all the time. They say they've stripped the other fronts and rushed the troops to Leningrad—troops have even come from Siberia. Leningrad is in German encirclement, but now we ourselves aim to surround the Germans. There's also bad news. Ligovo's in German hands (12 km from the city), all the roads are full of German tanks and troops as far as Ligovo. The Germans have hurled a large number of their units at Leningrad. V.* has been wounded. But it's all unofficial news.

"17th September. This evening there was an important event. The head of a building trust is moving into our flat. Some man called I. and his wife, from the Moscow district. Today their things were brought to the flat. Tomorrow he himself will probably appear. Mum's been promised the use of their bomb shelter and canteen. I don't know how it'll all work out.

"A bulletin from the Informbureau says that the Germans are preparing an intensive air assault on Leningrad.

"18th September. Today I went to see Finkelstein. We agreed to do duty at school. Tomorrow, from eight in the evening till eight in the morning. They've issued an order that men over 16 are to undergo military training. To begin with, however, the 17 and 18-year-olds are going. In the evening there was another order, which said that street fighting had begun in Leningrad, and that all males from 16 years of age and all women over 18 have to go to the barricades. What have we come to!

* Yura seems to have had K.E. Voroshilov in mind.

"The Germans have been shelling the city again. They've shelled Nevsky Prospekt, the bridges and the Frunze district.

"The barricades won't help us hold out. They're old-fashioned. Modern war demands aircraft, tanks, artillery—but barricades? Huh!

"Now the Germans will probably use poison gas. There are so many people and army personnel now in Leningrad, that if the Germans are going to use gas in this war at all, then this is the moment for it. It would do two things: allow them to take Leningrad and destroy a large part of the army. And it may well be that the Germans have poison gas of a kind unknown to us and our gas masks won't be effective against it. Now, how did the war start? There were all these German troops concentrated on our borders... Yet our noses didn't smell a rat. That's how it is going to be with chemical warfare, too.

"Oh well, I've unburdened my heart—that'll do for the moment."

Yura Ryabinkin frets and fumes, blaming all and sundry, he has nothing to occupy himself with and keep him calm, no responsibilities. He doesn't know what to do with himself, has nothing to turn his energies to. The special nature of the Leningrad front did not offer most adolescents the opportunity to help the army. Yura felt the danger, although he did not know the details or the scale of the impending disaster.

"22nd September. The news from the front is exceedingly bad. Kiev has fallen. This means that one third of Hitler's plan has been carried out. Is it possible that the Germans won't be hurled back from Leningrad? Everyone's saying that Leningrad's encircled by the Germans, and that the Germans are encircled by the Siberian Army under the command of Kulik. The boys at school joke: 'Kulik is pressing the Germans hard, the Germans are pressing us hard. In the end, Kulik will press the Germans so hard that they'll burst into Leningrad in panic.'

"'In every battalion ten rifles in all,
In each of the rifles one cartridge, that's all...'

"It's said that this song is true (...) I don't know whether it's really so or not. I'm not going to believe any more rumours.

"23rd and 24th September. Did duty at school. Nothing special happened. Learnt a new card game. No special air attacks on Leningrad. True, there were 13 alarms yesterday, but no bombing.

"They've cut the ration of meat and of some other things.

"I didn't go for a medical check at the training school. I don't know whether I'll go at all. But you never can tell!

"25th September. Today I've finally made up my mind as to what to do. I won't go to the training school. I'll go and collect my passport. I'll stay in the school fire-fighting team and I'll ask Mum to get us evacuated, so I can have an opportunity to study. For the time being I'll go digging trenches. In a year's time they'll call me up into the army. I'll be killed or I won't be killed. After the war I'll go to the ship-building institute or to the history department at the university. Meanwhile I'll earn as much as I can doing manual work. So I'm putting an end to the policy of wavering! Today I'll get to the school by eight o'clock. If Mum comes

in before that I'll tell her about my decision. All the other alternatives have been carefully considered by me, and I've rejected them.

"In addition, I've decided to spend on food for myself 2 or 1.50 roubles a day as from tomorrow.

"My decision makes me sick at heart, but it will spare me a still more terrible blow. And if I'm killed or crippled, it's all the same. And that's probably what it will come to. If I'm crippled, I'll finish myself off, if I'm to die—well you can only die once. It's good, very good, that Mum still has Ira.

"So from fear of losing my honour, I've put my whole life at stake. Sounds pompous, but I mean it.

"26th September. New factors have cropped up which might affect my decision. I don't know where Mum got this information, but she says that from October 1st everyone from the age of 16 will be called up into worker's squads. When I told her I wasn't going to the naval training school she made a great scene. She kept begging, begging me to go...

"All right, it's all the same... I'll go to the training school, just to please her (just for one day), and, poor thing, she doesn't know how it might all end.

"There's nothing much in the war bulletins. I don't believe rumours. Yesterday the city was shelled again."

Perhaps it was the thought of the medical check that put Yura off going to the training school. Was he afraid of being rejected as unfit? Was he ashamed of his poor state of health? His poor eyesight? He concealed his ill-health from everyone. Such almost morbid vanity and pride was quite in keeping with the character of this 16-year-old boy.

"1st and 2nd October. In the last few days obstinacy and pride have somehow come very much to the fore in my character. I think it's due to an incessant feeling of agitation. Poltava's been taken, more than that I don't know. The conference of the USA, Britain and the USSR, discussing what measures the allies plan to take to help the Soviet Union against nazi Germany, has come to an end.

"I'm still doing duty at school. Lyova Shvang recently joined our team. On the night of the 1st, when Finkelstein, Nikitin and I were in the attic, there was heavy bombing.

"I'm 16, but my health's that of an old man of 60. Oh, if only death would come. And let it happen so that Mum isn't too depressed.

"Goodness knows what kind of thoughts get into your head. Sometime in the future, when I or somebody else reads this diary, there will be scornful smiles (if not worse), but right now I don't care.

"Ever since I was a little boy I've had one dream—to become a sailor. And now that dream has turned to dust. So what has my life been for? If I don't get into the training school, I'll go and join the People's Volunteers, or something else, so that my death isn't in vain. I'll die defending my country.

"I thought I wouldn't write very much, but it's turned out to be a lot. Oh well, never mind.

"I still remember some of my English and that's not too bad considering the circumstances.

"Mum's still not back from work with Ira. The clock says a quarter past five. I'll play some chess and read, or maybe just go to bed. We'll wait and see...

"Mum's made a very interesting remark: 'Yura,' she said, 'you try to find out whether you'll be evacuated if you get into the training school.' A most interesting remark.

"Last evening Nikitin asked me: 'Yura, why don't we go to the training school?' Yes, that's what I dreamed of doing and to abandon a dream is like burying yourself alive. What to do? What shall I be? Where shall I be?.."

THE HUNDREDTH DAY OF THE WAR

On the hundredth day of the war, on September 29, 1941, Georgi Knyazev surveys anew everything on his small radius. Often his story lacks descriptive detail, the authentic dialogue of those years, fails to bring out that flesh which breathes life into the diaries of people with literary gifts or at least journalistic talents. Knyazev's diary does not have much of this. He did not hear in the conversations of those around him the characteristic expressions, the vogue words of wartime, which were quickly and sensitively reflected in popular speech. What was of greatest interest to him as a historian were facts and details that reflected the course of the war and people's frame of mind and behaviour. We could, of course, recall here the literary gift of such Russian historians as Klyuchevsky and Soloviev. With their brilliant mastery of style, they were not only historians but talented writers as well. It would be unjust, however, to demand this of every historian. But it is thus all the more interesting that daily, detailed entries made by a man who was by no means a literary figure, entries apparently devoid of literary merit, nevertheless have significant, in some respects unique, value—historical value. It appears that any thinking, educated man who sits down to write, with utmost honesty, about what he has lived through, what he has seen, heard, known, will eventually come out with something of interest to all, something in a way unique. Such records are not devaluated by the fact that there exist other testaments made by contemporaries.

And so, the 100th day of the war.

"29.9.41. Monday. The leaves are falling from the trees, buffeted by the gusty September wind. Everywhere the wind is sweeping sand into waves on the asphalt. The sky is sullen, but at intervals bright shafts of sunshine break through and our wonderful city is suffused with radiant light. Now when we are going through such a fearsome time, it has be-

come dearer, nearer even to those of us who have become accustomed to it and have grown indifferent to its beauty. Every building, street, square and lane—all of them are so very much part of our lives, so close to us and in such direct danger! Every day brings fires, destroyed buildings, the deaths of human beings... Still, people walk about the streets, work in the factories and offices. They come to work and quietly report: 'All our windows have been blown out. The house next door has been flattened by a blast bomb. We'll have to go to friends for the night.' No one knows what's going to happen next, nor even how this day, this brilliant September day, is going to end...

"Evening. They've been up twice already from the Karpinskys' flat to warn us that the alarm's gone. The second time they said that somewhere they'd heard the thud of a bomb falling. I'm tired after the day's effort, so I haven't bothered to go downstairs. M.F.'s reading Zagoskin. Highly suitable reading while a raid's in progress! I've been reading world history, and also writing these notes. I won't try to conceal that each time the floor begins to tremble slightly underfoot because of air vibration as a plane flies over the neighbourhood, you tense up involuntarily, painfully sensitive to the barely noticeable shock waves. You prick up your ears, wondering whether the ack-ack guns have opened fire from the naval ships on the Neva. No, the windowpanes aren't rattling, which means that enemy planes are not flying in our square of the grid. All the same, we're prepared. I'm sitting here in my cap and galoshes, and my overcoat is lying by my side. Just in case. And we're not sitting in the dining room, but in the entrance hall, where there are no windows, only doors. Above is the attic, we live on the top floor, the third from the ground, or the fourth, if you count the basement. So I involuntarily look up at the ceiling now and again.

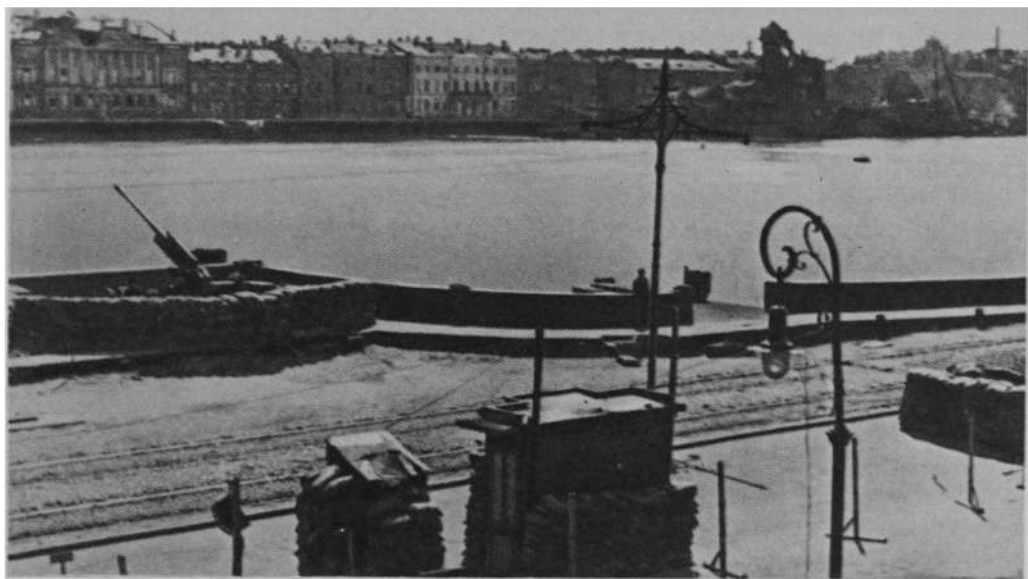
"In the daytime all these air raid alarms and artillery bombardments are bound to pass less noticeably. At work neither I nor anyone else leaves his working place. I couldn't even chase my colleagues out, the ones who weren't on watch duty, on that ill-fated day when Leningrad was shelled from long-range guns and even when part of the Senate building was set ablaze. But to endure bombing and shelling in the evening or at night is far more nerve-racking. Yesterday, after I watched the glow of fires for some time, I could not bring myself to undress for the night and went to bed fully clothed, waking instantly at the slightest quiver running through the house.

"Evidently very many Leningraders endure these days and nights in much the same way. I.L. told me at work today that after yesterday's bombing she'd had difficulty taking herself in hand and falling asleep, instead of just listening to the ominous silence. Many people sleep in the shelters or keep running to them every time there's an alarm. That's already a kind of psychosis. Some hang on, steadfast and obstinate. Among these are fatalists, believers and simply those who are indifferent to everything, people who are extremely calm by nature, or else very tired. Yesterday, when we were standing during an alarm in the doorway of a house on the embankment opposite St Isaac's, there was a young girl who did not want to go indoors, despite the insistent urgings of a mili-



tiaman. 'It's all the same to me whether I live or die,' she said vehemently. 'I'm sick and tired of everything, sick to death of it all.' At the time a lorry went by carrying a coffin surrounded by mourners with wreaths. 'There goes a lucky one,' the girl said. I could not help asking why she was in such a depressed mood. 'I've already lost two of my family and now I can't find the third. He was brought into Leningrad wounded, and I can't find out where they put him,' she said, the words tumbling out helter-skelter. I did not try to ask her any more questions, and anyway the all-clear went then. Everyone dashed out of doorways, from hiding, and rushed towards the trams which had stopped on their tracks.

"Others are stronger willed than that girl, yet feel a terrible weariness, extreme nervous tension... I was approached by Petrova who used to work for us, a young mother. 'How long will it last?' she asked me. 'What's going to happen next? I went to one canteen, then to another, and eventually found one where they gave me a ticket to queue, number seven hundred and something. By evening, they said, you might have dinner... I'm lucky enough the baby isn't going hungry so far. I received 500 roubles from my husband, but the money's lying there and I can't buy anything with it. What's going to happen? They say that Kronstadt's been razed to the ground,' she added. She said it all quite calmly, without any signs of agitation. But it's terrible to look at A.O. Her face looks bloodless, emaciated. Today she learnt that they were resuming the evacuation of mothers, which had been postponed, and in the face of unknown ordeals horror again looked out of her eyes. It is difficult here, in Leningrad, but there is at least work and the Academy's canteen, where she brings her two children to have dinner. But there, ahead, is the utterly unknown and fear clutches at her heart over the fate of her children and herself.



"I tried to calm both of them. I did not gloss over the terrible nature of events, but I pointed out that our situation was not hopeless. One only needed willpower not to succumb to pessimism and confusion. I must admit that they did not listen to me or, rather, they listened out of sheer politeness.

"Everyone asks the one persistent, importunate question: is this going to last long? Winter's drawing nearer. In addition to all the trials and deprivations there will be cold weather. And many people, even those with the strongest of nerves, cannot help wondering whether Leningrad can hold out.

"To that question Leningrad's women reply: 'We'll hold out!'

"Yesterday there was a meeting of the city's women. There were speeches by actresses, and women writers and workers. A unanimous call was made for the defence of Leningrad. The women promised to be steadfast to the end and do their bit to help the city's defenders. The entire meeting rose to applaud a girl, a member of a volunteer squad, who had carried 29 wounded soldiers to safety from forward positions during battle. In doing this she herself had been wounded twice. That's genuine heroism!

"I have deliberately written in such detail about the impressions I've received on my small radius. Like life in general, life in besieged Leningrad is full of contradictions. Those who will speak in the future only of our weariness and depression will not be telling the truth; those who will assert that Leningraders displayed nothing but heroism will be equally wrong. It has been life, with all its contradictions. I have tried to capture a sliver of that life on these pages.

"5.10.41. 106th day. Valya, the little girl we were going to take under

our wing, came to see us. Their house is half in ruins as a result of blast. The building next door has been totally demolished by a heavy high-explosive bomb. They live in Degtyarnaya Street. All their furniture is wrecked, the doors have been torn off their hinges, there are no windows, what's more, no panes. Their house was damaged when she and her mother were digging trenches (her mother had taken her along, as there was no one to leave her with). That was why they were safe and sound. They spent most of their time in the bomb shelter. There was nothing to eat, her mother had no work, and only a dependent's card, that is, the shortest ration. Valya sat there with frightened eyes, listening intently. 'There seems to be an alarm,' she said. 'I'll run along and wait in the bomb shelter in your yard.' We made inquiries—there was no alarm. All the same, she sat there like a cat on hot bricks... We gave her some money and whatever food we could... Poor, unfortunate child! Why should she suffer so much?

'6, 7, and 8.10.41. 107th, 108th, 109th days. We've had three days that have been extremely troubled, or, rather, alarming, intensely nerve-racking. Nothing special has happened, everything's the same, but it is perceived somewhat differently. We are most ordinary people, there is nothing particular about us, and there is absolutely nothing heroic for me to write about. There's only one thing that's worth mentioning—it's that we're working all the time, even during alarms no one stops work at the Archives. That's all there is to say about our 'heroism'. True, this is no small thing with all that Leningraders have to endure... I must give credit to my colleagues: they work well despite the alarms and the cold, the undernourishment, the trying experiences in the canteen and the semi-sleepless nights. Some live in flats without windowpanes, others have been forced to move in with friends. Shakhmatova works her best, Krutikova also works well... Tsvetkova can hardly drag herself along—she's both hungry and suffering from lack of sleep—but still... Altogether I'm pleased with my collective. They not only do their work, they also take their turn at the evening and night watch, remaining at their post during air raids and shelling.

'In the next few days they're going to teach us to shoot on the range at the University. Stulov's shortsighted, and doesn't see anything at a distance. Modzalevsky's in the same class... These are two of the Archive 'warriors' who are being trained for the last line of reserve. But the Archives have also supplied a real, one hundred per cent soldier, politically solid and with broad horizons, A.M. Chernikov. We also have P.N. Koryakov, a volunteer, who is fighting in the front line, a modest, honest Party member. From the Moscow department of the Archives Getman has gone to the front as a volunteer. These belong to the civilian and military activists of the Archives.

'9.10.41. 110th day. Professor K.F. Ogorodnikov, a Red Armyman, spoke on the radio. He is a scientist, a doctor of mathematics and physics, and for 19 years has been doing laboratory studies on the structure of the night sky, observing celestial bodies through a telescope. Now he's in the ranks of the Red Army, where he's gone as a volunteer, and he has learnt to fire a gun and throw a hand grenade. He said: 'I have many pupils, many friends and acquaintances. I'd like them to know that their profes-

sor and colleague, Red Armyman Ogorodnikov, will be steadfast and brave fighting the enemy, as befits a Soviet soldier.'

"Then the professor shifted into English, addressing his colleagues in allied Britain. He conveyed greetings to Sir Spencer Jones, the Royal Astronomer, and to Professor Marshall Smart, with whom he had been associated for many years in joint work in astronomy.

"10.10.41. 111th day. Have been working all evening on the history of the Academy of Sciences. Now it's nearly midnight. For the third time a girl student, Nekhorosheva, has come to tell us about an alarm. I'm sitting in the hall with my coat on. It's cold. If you listen carefully you can hear the ack-ack guns firing from time to time. I've laid aside the reference cards with summaries for the history of the Academy of Sciences. Involuntarily listening to the booming of guns, I took a sheet of paper on which to record my impressions of the day.

"13.10.41. 114th day... My dear distant friend, will you need all these details, emotions and thoughts of a contemporary of shattering world events, of a man honestly trying to record his own and others' experiences, to give a reflection of events? Perhaps I sometimes repeat myself, write too much, or, on the contrary, leave out something more interesting. You will skip passages you find lengthy and pardon me my omissions. Reading these lines, you will share with me all my profound anxiety for man, humanity, humanism..."

Knyazev was living through bitter times. He felt that in the fires of war compassion in people had been turned to ashes by hatred, that the only possible manifestation of humanity was now the destruction of the German invaders. Compassion had deserted the world, he lamented... He did not yet know about Majdanek, Oswiecim and Buchenwald, about the ovens in which people were burnt to death, about the gas chambers, about the meticulously worked out technology of mass extermination of peoples considered dispensable by the vile theoreticians of National-Socialism. For us war with Germany began as a war against invaders and aggressors. Gradually, for an increasing number of people there opened up other sides of this war—the necessity to annihilate the brown plague of fascism, threatening all of mankind. Not immediately were hatred for fascism and love for mankind united in our hearts and minds.

The destruction of fascism was, indeed, tantamount to love for man, was humanism, was all that this elderly romantic historian longed for. But everyone came to this in his or her own way. That day Olga Bergholtz wrote:

*With all life's fury and splendour—
Fire, armour and words that bleed
We must make the fascists surrender
We must sweep them off their feet.*

Meanwhile a hall was being readied in the Hermitage for a meeting to celebrate the 800th anniversary of Nizami.

"16.10.41. Day 117. Once again there is bad news from the Vyazma and Kalinin sectors. Evidently, enemy troops have finally broken through our line of resistance near Moscow, which is a catastrophe for us all. We are beset with a sense of alarm. The homeland is in mortal danger.

"20.10.41. Day 121. At 6 a.m. the radio started broadcasting news. In Moscow a state of emergency has been announced. For any breach of order, or the spreading of provocative rumours, the penalty is shooting on the spot. Maly Yaroslavets, on the approaches to Moscow, keeps changing hands. In 1812 this much-suffering town passed from the Russians to the French and back more than ten times! The situation on the Moscow Front seems to have deteriorated disastrously.

"21.10.41. Day 122. Leningrad's food situation is worsening. In the second ten-day period of October the ration for dependents, apart from the daily 200 grammes of bread, was a total of 100 g of meat, 200 g of cereal, 100 g of fish products, 50 g of sugar, 100 g of sweets, and 100 g of cooking oil; office workers and children received a little more, while workers got twice as much as the latter. There is nothing to be bought with money, so it has lost its value. People who have a lot of money do not know what to do with it, and spend it on all kinds of trash (expensive perfumes and so on) or (those who are more practical) buy up the remaining manufactured goods in the shops for purposes of exchange when money completely loses value. Of all the trials awaiting Leningraders, hunger is perhaps the most terrifying. Hunger and bombing! All we need now is cholera, or plague, or simply the typhus that accompanies hunger! You have to train yourself to look events straight in the eye and think as little as possible about the future. When that future comes, then we'll make sense of it! Today our handyman Filimonov dropped in. 'It's hard to work,' he said. 'I've lost strength, not enough to eat. In the Academy's canteen they've had rye macaroni with water instead of soup two days running.'

22.10.41. Day 123. Night, or rather morning, it will soon be dawn. Now we, Leningraders, forgetting our woes and sorrows, turn all our thoughts to Moscow, to the heart of our Soviet homeland. How could it possibly have happened that the enemy has crushed our armies and infiltrated into the most vital centres of our country? That is the relentless, agonising question. The enemy, armed with the most modern and perfect military technology, with all the achievements of science, has made use of all this to destroy and annihilate, becoming a conqueror and ravisher. He is destroying all cultural treasures in his path, like a savage barbarian, a vandal or Hun, only a hundred times worse. Those others had no science or technology, were simply two-legged beasts. The German invader is a two-legged civilised beast!

"Hitler has drawn up all his forces near Moscow and thrown reserves into the battle. Can one sleep calmly on nights like these, when the battle for Moscow is raging, the most bloody battle in history, for the integrity and very existence of our homeland!

"It's said that Hitler made a speech in which he threatened to wipe Moscow off the face of the earth as the source of the red scourge. That was four months ago, and was monstrously boastful, preposterous... And

now, in these louring October days his armies are near Moscow!

"21.10.41. Day 122 (continued). It appears that the bomb which was dropped by the vultures a few days ago between 5 and 6 in the evening and fell into the Moika River was an exceptionally powerful one. It was undoubtedly intended for the General Staff Headquarters. It fell not far from the house in which Pushkin lived and died...

"23.10.41. Day 124. A dull day. Rain. And people rejoice, as they never rejoiced at the sun and warmth. 'Not a flying day,' they say. 'They won't be bombing.'

"Hunger has somewhat disorganised work at the Archives. I.L. has particularly weakened—she is, in all honesty, quite ill. She sits in Room 12, near the toilet, where a stove has been installed, and smokes unceasingly. And coughs.

"We are doing everything we can to get the Archives heated for the winter. But only one room will be heated... Today I could hardly sit it out in a temperature of two degrees above zero.

"Today E.T.'s mother, who has always been mentally unbalanced, could no longer bear all the ordeals we are beset by, and in a fit of morbid suspicion was about to strangle her own daughter. E.T. has to spend the nights either at work or with acquaintances.

"I was driving along in my wheel-chair this morning by beds newly dug for next year's flowers and was again deeply touched... Life triumphant!

"Andreyev and I have planned a meeting devoted to the memory of Behring. It is to be held in December..."

CHILDHOOD ENDED

When you read Yura Ryabinkin's notes for the same few days, you seem to be in another world. Incidentally, why "seem to be"? You really are in another world—the world of youth. The tragic events could not suppress the overflowing vitality, faith and gaiety of youth. There were cards, games, draws, banter, dreams and fears—all this making one effervescent whole, tossing these lads, still half-way between childhood and youth, from side to side.

But it is already possible to distinguish traits of his character. Destiny, as someone once said, is already knocking at the door. Oh, how simply and easily are wounds healed at that age, how fleeting were all the recent fears of the medical check for entry to the naval training school. All this time Yura continues to keep himself under strict and demanding observation, passing judgement on himself. It is probably this trait that links Georgi Knyazev and Yura Ryabinkin.

Yura's family came from the old intelligentsia, at any rate on the side of his mother, Antonina Mikhailovna, maiden name Pankina. Her father, Yura's grandfather, graduated from the Artillery Training School before the Revolution, served as an officer, after 1917 was in the ranks of the

Red Army, and was nominated assistant chief of the north-west artillery base. His mother finished a gymnasium and had a good knowledge of French, German and Polish. The family had an extensive collection of books—Russian and foreign. We found out about all this later on. Among what is left of the family archives are photographs of Yura's grandfather and great-grandfather, also a military man, and the grandfather's magnificent drawings.

"3rd October 1941. It's been a very exciting day for me. I was at school from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. We were playing Twenty-one. I lost 10 kopeks. But that was nothing. I had dinner—roast suckling pig with lentils and brawn. Then I went back to the staffroom and we sat down to play Twenty-one, I, Bron, Finkelstein, Lopatin and another boy from a different shift. First it all went pretty much as usual, and I neither lost nor won. But then my turn came to be dealer. I put a rouble in. But everyone else had done that before me. I took the bank. And as ill luck would have it, the other guys stood pat. But I was lucky, the bank increased... 2 roubles, 4 roubles... 8 roubles... 16 roubles! I knocked. A second round! 32 roubles! The players were getting excited, all avidly watching the cards ... 64 roubles!!! The boys chipped in and stood pat again. Their nine, my ace!!! And 128 roubles in the bank!!! Incredible excitement... And then... Once again the lads stood pat. Bron said, 'I stand pat.' His cards were face down, then I turned up my card—a Queen... Bron cautiously turned his up—a Queen!!! I took the bank—a whole 256 roubles!!!

"I don't know what came over me. I sat there like an idiot. What a win! What a thing to happen! I began to play again... I played ... and played—and broke the bank again several times in a row. The result was that I won about 400 roubles (73 roubles in cash). I suddenly felt very sick at heart... What would I do with all that money? I picked it up and gave it back to the boys. But Lopatin had already gone. Bron muttered something in reply. So I now have about 40 roubles in cash, Bron owes me 130 roubles and Finkelstein 100, while Lopatin and that other boy owe me 40 roubles each. Of course I won't take money from any of them... What a powerful emotion! When the bank rose to (...) the first time, I just wanted to say: 'Boys, I'm not going on, don't play...' It was all turning out somehow childishly and awkwardly. But no one noticed. And it was odd that when I was winning it did not make me happy but gave me a kind of sick surprise. I was somehow petrified and for a long while, for minutes on end, I laughed nervously. It's true what the proverb says: 'Money can't buy one happiness.' That's how it was in this case. I hid the money away at home in a sweet tin that lay inside a cardboard box on the book stand. Really, what is all this doing to me? Am I going crazy?

"4th October. I still can't get back to normal after that win. To be exact, it's not the win but the consciousness of the win that I found so exciting. Of course I didn't take the money off the boys.

"Mum's going away to do free volunteer work with Ira on the 5th.

"I'm writing all this in the morning of the 5th. Now I'll relate the events of last night. There were about eight alarms during the night. They



were terrible alarms. Several times a bomb whined so loudly as it came down that I thought it would fall on the school. At exactly 1 a.m. I took over from Finkelstein on the tower. There was no alarm at that point. The first half hour passed quietly. Then the silence was suddenly pierced by a whistle, and then another one and yet another... A flash, thunder—a flash, thunder. I jumped from the table, on which I'd been sitting and looked fearfully from the tower window. Around ten incendiary bombs were smoking away in the schoolyard and on the roofs of neighbouring houses. I immediately gave three signals—at the third post (...) Later it turned out that I was somewhat mistaken—the bomb had fallen by the school wall, in the yard where the third post was. Well, they put all the incendiaries out quickly. Then the Germans dropped several high-explosive bombs, and after that the plaintive wail of the siren cut through the air. At my post everything was calm. But the alarms, from that one on, were very special. The ack-ack guns were absolutely silent. All you could hear was the distant buzzing of planes, now growing, now fading, and at intervals a resounding whistle—then a piercing sound and the crr-rump of an explosion. I was too agitated that night. I didn't sleep at all. That's the kind of nights we're getting in Leningrad now. David said that he had also heard somewhere that Pskov and Staraya Russa had been taken by Kulik...

"5th and 6th October. The days passed in a state of turmoil as a result of the endless alarms. Today, or to be precise right now, it is 9 p.m., 6th of October. An alarm. I and Anfisa Nikolayevna (wife of the man who has been put into the flat with Yura's family.—A.A., D.G.) are at home. Mum and Ira have gone downstairs. We've had a letter from Tina. On 2nd October she was alive and well. She writes that they're being bombed. Just hints at it, of course. She's worried about us. At school they've started

classes for the tenth grade. I've asked Nina Nikolayevna to set me some homework in maths. She's given me some. Nikitin's already been accepted at the training school, and has been through all the formalities by now...

"8th October. I've been for the medical. It turns out I did the right thing. They didn't pass me because of my eyes. I've got 20 per cent vision in my left eye and 40 per cent in the right. How about that! Mum insists on immediate treatment. I'll probably have to wear specs. Volodya Nikitin went in for his check after me. Well, they'll no doubt take him. But the chief thing in that I got past the surgeon and the ear specialist. As far as the situation at the front, my information is somewhat vague. Last night I dreamt of Volodya Shmailov. Where might he be now?

"Mum's forbidden me to read, so that I don't ruin my eyes.

"I'm writing all this today, the ninth. If I'd written it yesterday, I'd have covered two or three pages, but today I haven't got the time. I've got to go on duty.

"9th October. Today's turn of duty was better as compared with the others. It was almost too good to be true. There was nothing much doing up to dinnertime, but after that things really got going. It started when Nina Nikolayevna forbade us to play cards for money. We began playing Pig. Alek was the loser. His penalty was to go into the street, approach the first passer-by, look him or her in the face and say: 'I'm a pig.' What a laugh we had! Then we got down to playing forfeits. Lopatin crawled a whole flight up the spiral staircase on all fours, Finkelstein had to give Bron a piggy-back, while I was supposed, first, to catch a cat and let it loose in the staff room, and second, kiss Ella. I did the first, but refused to do the second. Which I regret now, for my punishment was to have water poured down my neck, (it landed on my shirt). Altogether we all had a lot of fun. Towards the end we caught a cat and fastened a piece of paper to it, saying: 'Supper or death to the cat!', then let it go. The cat dashed into the canteen. What happened next I don't know. Later we listened to a concert of works by Russian composers on the radio.

"It's now 7.30. The alarm's sounded. The sky's almost cloudless. Here's the situation at the front according to official bulletins: Oryol has been taken and the Germans are advancing on Vyazma and some other towns. According to rumours, the Germans have been beaten back from Leningrad at least 60 kilometres. In all probability the seventh, eighth and ninth grades will start studies on 25th October.

"There's an alarm on at the moment.

"11th and 12th October. Nothing special happened.

"Mum and Ira are downstairs, and I'm at home. It's 7.30.

"At school they think that the Germans have decided to finish the war by winter and have launched a wide-scale offensive on Moscow. Finkelstein says that Nikitin didn't pass the credence commission. Even if that is so, with a father like his, he'll get into the training school anyway.

"For some reason I keep thinking of Volodya and Misha. Oh, friends, friends! I keep cursing myself for taking leave of Volodya the way I did. If only we could get back to the good old days. A marvellous time it was!

"Igor (the brother of Anfisa Nikolayevna. — A.A., D.G.) has promised



to bring us a 1st category ration card. I don't know if anything will come of it.

"The sooner we start studying the better. It's boring.

"Today I played Twenty-one at school. Finkelstein now owes me 121 roubles (I shan't take any money from him anyway). The boys now tell me I'm incredibly lucky at cards. Lucky at cards, unlucky in love, as the saying goes. I'd prefer it to be the other way round.

"When I break the bank or have a successful turn as dealer and win a substantial sum, a fixed, malicious kind of smile appears on my face, and now I try hard to get rid of it. Nevertheless, it crosses my face now and then. That's a nasty habit of mine.

"13th October. It's been a quiet day. But the night was pretty bad. In the evening I heard some very interesting news from Mum. Sha saw (...), who now works at a military hospital. They're proposing that I go to work at that hospital. My job would be to transfer patients from one hospital to another. I would be solely responsible for their safe transport. For losing someone I would be up before a court. I am supposed to take them around at night, mainly by car, for which I will get 20 roubles a month and a worker's ration card. And maybe dinner. I'd work a day and have the next day free. I agreed. We need food badly.

"I saw Volodya Nikitin. He's been accepted by the training school. They start on the 15th.

"According to my preliminary opinion, the night was going to be quite a favourable one. Clouds in the sky, somewhat foggy—what kind of plane would fly over and drop bombs in weather like that? ...But at five minutes to seven the air raid warning went.

"At the 2nd and 1st posts there was myself, David, Boris (...) and also two women we didn't know. David and I sat on the steps. These endless nights full of anxiety shall always remain in my memory. We're sitting in semi-darkness. Before me is a lantern in a bucket, a staircase and to one side a window. The ack-ack guns are booming, my ears are alert for every sound, my heart races when I hear the loud whine of bombs, and I listen attentively for the noise of a German plane. The window's constantly being lit up by flashes of light, sometimes the staircase and even the whole building shudder and quiver when a high-explosive bomb drops nearby. It's like that every night... You want to sleep, to eat, to forget everything, but then something whistles in your ear again and you instinctively press yourself to the wall, your head hunched between your shoulders ... and the whistling fades. Then a flash lights up the window, the staircase shakes, and only after that you hear the distant thud of an explosion.

"Last night was more or less calm, and David and I went out onto the roof. We had barely enough time to look around. The searchlights were sweeping the sky, when quite suddenly we heard the furious hiss of a bomb, a sound rapidly gaining in volume. In an instant David and I were in the attic, oblivious to any bruises from our fall. Having decided that it would be dangerous to stay in the attic, we went out onto the staircase, and just then we heard a brief whistling sound, followed by an explosion right over our heads. It became lighter than day. David was the first to

grasp what had happened and, grabbing a spade, rushed to put the bomb out. I ran, too. We plunged into furious activity. We were working in thick, acrid smoke, which got into the throat, irritated it, and penetrated right into our lungs. Sweat ran down our faces all the time we were busy with the incendiaries. I rushed to the 1st post. A woman was standing there, shouting in fright: 'A bomb! Put it out!' She grabbed handfuls of sand and threw it at the burning pieces of thermite. I seized a spade and in half a minute had covered with sand anything still burning. Brilliant light was replaced by pitch darkness. I somehow managed to get down from the attic and, leading the woman by the hand, I ran to the 2nd post. There all the bombs had already been extinguished. I looked at the roof. About ten people were scurrying about there. I felt I needed to breathe in some fresh air, clear my mind, come to. Soon the all-clear went. After that, nothing new occurred. There was another air raid warning, but we didn't have any trouble. Then Finkelstein and I fell asleep and slept right through till morning. We were awakened by the radio reporting the rotten news that Vyazma has fallen. The German offensive is continuing.

"I later learned that 23 incendiary bombs had fallen on our school (I put out two, and helped to put out a third).

"14th October. Today there was a disgraceful scene at home. Ira went into hysterics over the fact that I had eaten in the trust canteen, while she hadn't even had a plate of soup. Mum told her to calm down. At the same time she told me that Ira was offered borsch in the canteen and beans with pork fat. But Ira had said that these things made her sick, and refused to eat them. She had eaten up the remaining half bar of chocolate and that was all. She had herself refused to eat and was now ticking me off. 'I am going hungry!' she declares. Who's stopping her having her dinner? Mum's starting to tell me that we have to get used to the idea that if a person was given a plate of soup during the day, he had to be satisfied. And suppose I couldn't get used to that idea? I don't eat even half, or a quarter of what I need to fill me up... Oh, war, war...

"Now it's dull, cloudy weather. It has grown cold, snow's falling.

"15th and 16th October. Nothing particular has happened. Today David and I didn't go to school, but instead went to see 'Dangerous Corner' at the theatre. It's a marvellous play. The sets are splendid, all in all the play's superb, but unfortunately the whole thing comes over as something of a farce. Still I liked it so much that I put it on a par with 'An Ideal Husband'.

"This evening, during the night alarm, I extinguished an incendiary in the yard, saving the firewood from burning, and also the house.

"The situation at the fronts is atrocious. According to the latest information Mariupol has been taken, the Kalinin sector has been formed and, to make things still worse, there recently was a German breakthrough in the western sector. Just the thought of the future makes my hair stand on end: the use of poison gas, the cold winter, nazi oppression, and what not. Or the front, death, bombing, either dead or crippled (...), but I manage so far somehow.

"17th October. I've committed a terrible crime: I've lost the key to the flat. Mum will have something to say to me when she gets home. I went to

the eye clinic. The doctor there sees patients from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., every day except Friday. On Friday the hours are from 2 p.m. I also went to the photographers' and had a photo made for my passport. It'll probably look absolutely horrid because of the hair hanging all over my forehead.

"Yesterday there was a disgusting scene between our neighbours. When I. returned home, he suspected his wife of smoking (smoking for someone who has TB is slow, sure death). He began to abuse her at the top of his voice, not in the least troubled about the fact that we could easily hear him. She seemed to be denying it, but he shouted: 'No, no, no! Lies, lies, lies!' at machine-gun rate. Later, when there was an alarm, he made ready to go to the shelter, and began to drag her with him. She did not want to go. Then he snatched from her hand the bag containing the key to their room and went off. She caught up with him, grabbed hold of the bag, and a short tussle took place. And all in full view of us! After that there were still more scenes. Only I haven't written about it here. She is his second wife, he and his first wife had divorced. But I don't envy this one's life, even though she does have enough to eat. I'd sacrifice all my meagre food if it would save me from being insulted like that.

"The situation is dreadful at the fronts. The Western Front has been breached, German shock troops are creeping towards Moscow, encircling our forces. Nazi planes are bombing Leningrad every night. The same thing is probably happening to Moscow, Kharkov and other cities. There is a blackout throughout the Urals, and it is rumoured that Ufa has been bombed.

"Today I asked Igor about the position at the front. He says that Moscow is in great danger. Leningrad is completely cut off from the rest of the USSR. On the Leningrad Front things are not too bad, it's holding. Stocks of food are running out in Leningrad, and soon, very likely, there'll be deaths from starvation, epidemics and so on. I recall with regret that we did not go into evacuation. I am afraid even to look ahead—you take it a day at a time.

"At school tomorrow I'll refuse to do night duty because I have no warm boots. This is not the time to catch cold.

"Hunger gives you an itchy sensation in the pit of the stomach and your mouth waters all the time. I still feel hungry though I've had dinner at the trust canteen. Above all the absence of bread has its effect. Today Mum bought some spiced cakes made of oats with a little sugar. Praise be for such. I'd be willing to live on that much, even for as long as three years, if only they didn't cut the ration. But then that's inevitable..."

In the autumn, as we know, Leningrad was supplied with provisions across Lake Ladoga. But it turns out that already then, well in advance, people were thinking about a winter road and about what would happen when the lake froze. *Yevgeni Churov*, who at the time was serving as an officer-hydrographer, tells this story:

"In September the Baltic Fleet Command submitted to the Military Council a plan of measures for organising an ice-road service during the

winter of 1941-42, and the routes we investigated were roughly those adopted eventually.

"The man who put the plan forward was Yury Kovel, flag-officer navigator of the Baltic Fleet and a wonderful specialist. Little has been written about him—it would be truer to say that nothing has been written about him. He was a very modest man. He ended up as Vice-Admiral, head of the Operational Administration at the General Staff. I consider that meeting him was a great milestone in my life, for he was a man with a gigantic capacity for operational thinking. In 1942, when the battle of Stalingrad was only getting under way, Yuri Kovel explained to me how the war would proceed. You know, he had never seen the General Staff's plans, but showed me on the map that the German offensive would be checked somewhere near Stalingrad (mind you, Kovel had only just finished the academy and was still comparatively young).

"Later on he proved that the rout of the Germans at Stalingrad would be accomplished by means of encirclement. That was a very important point. What's more, to show the strength of the tactics and strategy of encirclement a profound understanding of the military situation was required. There was something else he said, too—that the blockade could not be lifted until 1944 at the earliest.

"So Yuri Kovel told me that there was a plan of measures for the organisation of ice routes and ice roads across Lake Ladoga and the Finnish Gulf (that was the title of the document).

"The decision was taken that when the ice appeared observation of the ice conditions would be organised everywhere. We set up patrols to keep watch on the growth of the ice in the Shlisselburg estuary and Morye Bay. We went by plane to examine the southern part of the lake.

"There had been some practical experience in this field—in the north of our country, in the White Sea, troops had already made their way across ice. Academician Vasily Shuleikin, one of our celebrated scientists, had taken part in this, and he was the first to elaborate the theory of the passability of sea ice for vehicles and machinery. He devised the first table in the world for calculating the load limit per square centimetre of ice surface, in relation to air temperature, which is extremely important, to changes in the force and velocity of the wind, and to the presence or absence of snow cover... At training school they gave us a course on road maintenance, so we were familiar with Shuleikin's tables and his formulas."

Meanwhile Yura Ryabinkin had his own problems and his worries:

"18th and 19th October. Mum took two days off. She wanted to go to get potatoes, but matters took their own course. A whole lorry-load of cabbage was delivered to the canteen. All the people in our house threw themselves on it. People got as much as they could. Khabidugai took about 40 cabbages, and we got 10 because Ira was the only one of us who was there to carry it. The next day we ate cabbage until we couldn't eat any more. The night was quiet.

"The situation at the front is terrible...

"They say that lessons are going to start on the 25th of October, I don't think, however, that it will happen. The last communiqué said that we had been evacuating Odessa during the last eight days.

"I've just been looking ahead. If the German offensive is beaten back, then everything will be O.K. We shall have won the war. But if it's only halted, then it means prolonged hunger for us. If the Germans take Moscow, we're all as good as dead.

"20th October. I had a boring morning. Later, I went out looking for kvass, didn't find any but was chilled to the bone and returned home. At home it was below zero, so I had to wear my overcoat. I had dinner at the trust canteen—cabbage soup and beets. I ate, sat for a while, then to see Mum at work. There I borrowed a book by Voltaire and Dumas, *La Dame de Monsoreau* and *Les Quarante-et-Cinq*, its sequel, from the stocks. I ate oatmeal soup in the canteen there. Then I went home. When I got back there was an alarm. I read some Voltaire. No, before that, Igor dropped in. He said he'd bring the ration card this evening, but I don't believe him any more. They are still not giving out anything in the shops for the third ten-day period. In the evening a very peculiar thing happened. As I have said, I brought home from Mum's work some books by Dumas. I brought them for myself because I have nothing to read. Then Anfisa Nikolayevna comes into the room with the air of being its rightful owner, and says: 'Nina Mikhailovna, I borrowed Zola from you. I've brought it back' (it was I who gave her the book, but never mind that). She goes over to the table, picks up Dumas and says: 'Nina Mikhailovna, I'll take Dumas from you, I've nothing to read.' And Mum proceeded to shower praises on the book, she really went out of the way to laud it. I was infuriated, and began to object (with a smile on my face!—what depths we've sunk to in self-abasement), that I wanted to read the book myself, but Mum started shouting at me, saying I could read Voltaire, etc. There was nothing I could do about it. Anfisa Nikolayevna took the book and went. Now I have a pretty good idea of the policy of that Anfisa Nikolayevna. I can see right through her. For one thing, she wants to see us become subservient in her presence, to put it mildly, and does her best to bring us under control. Secondly, seeing how desperate we are for bread, sugar, and so on, while she herself is eating her fill, she does not want to 'give'—well, let's presume that she is very, very egoistical and selfish, though, who knows, perhaps she is right in her own way. Since Mum took a glass of candy from her promising to return it and hadn't done so, she has categorically decided not to give us a crumb. And now I feel shame when I see Mum drinking water to fill herself up, while A.N. stands by talking about the theatre, and Mum says: 'Well, things are going from bad to worse. But somehow or other we'll pull through.'

"Perhaps I'm too proud and conceited, but I can't watch such things without flushing with anger. And what's worse, I sometimes behave the same way myself. That Anfisa Nikolayevna is like a plump, well-fed cat that lies on the sofa, purring: 'Well then, come and tickle me!' She tells her husband absolutely everything (except about herself), while he (birds of a feather flock together) does just what she wants, without realising it

himself. We've just had another interesting little performance: Igor had promised us a 1st category ration card and had told me he'd bring it this evening. She's been to Mum and said without so much as an apology: 'Igor can't bring you the card because it's been (...) taken away.' I'm hundred per cent sure that she just took it for herself. She's not used to returning a service—she's accustomed to getting services from others, without offering anything in exchange apart from flattering words. I can't imagine what's come over Mum, she gave her a great big cabbage, but to (...) whose attitude to us is really friendly, she gave only a little one..."

THE BORDERLINE!

As yet unconscious of the fact, not realising it themselves, Yura Ryabinkin and those close to him were nearing the borderline towards which the siege, the hunger were pushing and driving many others. Some managed not to slide downhill, did not overstep the limit. Others were unable to resist. But even those who held out, who stood firm in the face of unbearable ordeals and did not cross the line—they too underwent a change. At least this was obvious to others, even if the person himself was unaware of it. Things had changed beyond recognition. Standards changed in concepts and behaviour. When a teacher whose husband has died of hunger tells her colleagues in joyful excitement: "You know, what luck, the morgue's right on our doorstep!"—it must mean something's turned upside down in the world (from the diary of K.V. Polzikova-Rubets). And although Ksenia Polzikova-Rubets records that incident with obvious condemnation (thus not accepting the new standards), it must be realised that that same woman would never have said anything like it, either before or after the siege. It was not love or sorrow that had undergone change, but the possibilities open to people. The mere fact that a decent burial was possible, that one could get the body to the morgue was in itself something to be happy about.

Yura Ryabinkin had yet to discover for the first time the good and bad sides in himself and in others. He found fault with his neighbour Anfisa Nikolayevna solely because she was better fed than he. Occasionally he managed to check himself and then he would see the good, humanitarian side of her. Georgi Knyazev had seen a good deal of life. He guessed at, even foresaw, the borderline beyond which you were not yourself any more, or, in any case, not altogether in control of your own behaviour, your actions. Knyazev believed in people, in his own inner resources and he loved life; nevertheless he made note of a hook in the ceiling as a last resort. He even checked with the encyclopedia (as befitted an intellectual) to learn the precise details. Having "studied this question" he mulled it over and reassured himself: no, he would not let himself cross the borderline. Better death at once! Perhaps there were people who felt they were omnipotent, who were convinced that even after hunger had eaten away their brain, it would not deprive them of willpower or human likeness.

But for Knyazev thinking meant remaining oneself. He was not given to panic. In those circumstances it took a good deal of courage. There have been cases of people shooting themselves dead before going into battle. The fear of being killed tomorrow drove them to kill themselves the day before. Or was it fear of being afraid of death?

Panic in the face of hunger, fear of hunger-induced insanity and of an agonising death, often destroyed people before death itself. Even strong-willed people, clear of mind and whole of heart were subject to panic. But these were quicker to control themselves. Faina Prusova wrote in her diary:

"On the advice of one elderly woman I boiled the wall-paper. But it made me feel so nauseous that I threw it out at once—what a waste of water! Boiled a leather belt, too (the yardkeeper suggested it)—got the same muddy, dirty water. Poured it away immediately... And at this point we all promised one another not to get hysterical, and not to eat any muck, come what may!"

What Knyazev anticipated and prepared himself to meet calmly and with dignity (to fight till the last, but if his strength gave out, end it all himself), was something that descended upon sixteen-year-old Yura Ryabinkin unexpectedly and incomprehensibly. For the first time he was to confront death, hunger, other people and himself. In this, more than elsewhere, he would make unexpected and cruel discoveries...

Knyazev was much further from the borderline than many others. All his inner strength, all he had accumulated in his lifetime, drawn from books and developed in himself, had proved sufficient at that stage and would allow him to cope with much more. Those very intellectual qualities which had come under attack more than once and in other circumstances had been considered a weakness and even a survival of the past, proved during the blockade how necessary they were, proved their strength, their indispensability.

"Intelligentsia!" Knyazev exclaimed, arguing with others and with himself. Just imagine it, there had been a time when even he had occasionally admitted to himself that those who uttered the word "intellectual" with contempt might have had some point. "Yes, we remain what we were, what we've always been... We still have a sense of shame, a conscience," he wrote. "The great humanistic Russian culture and the prerequisites for the October Revolution were created by those 'funny' old intellectuals. I am doing everything I can to remain considerate and kind towards people, to make life easier. I have no bread but so far I still have words, good, heartening words. Unfortunately, they don't take the place of bread... But how disgusting it is when others without bread resort to stone throwing..."

"26.10.41. Day 127. As I was climbing the stairs to the flat, A., who was about to overtake me, asked, 'Well, what does the great optimist think is going to happen to Moscow? Will we win or will we surrender it?' I replied to the effect that the situation is definitely very serious. A decisive battle's raging outside Moscow, and both the enemy and ourselves have pulled in all possible forces there... But no matter what happens, I'm quite certain that Germany won't defeat us. We have on our side the human resources and the inexhaustible material resources of the USA and Britain, both also fighting nazi Germany. It's a fight to the death, there can be no compromise peace. Germany will be defeated in the end... It's this knowledge that keeps up my spirits and optimism.

"A. smiled without answering.

"The 'Internationale' has just sounded out over the radio. The day has drawn to a close, it's after 11 o'clock. Tonight we'll sleep with our clothes on.

"That's on my small radius. But what's happening in Moscow? My heart bleeds for the Muscovites in the ordeals they're having to go through... A decisive battle is going on, and the Muscovites are in the thick of it. The very thought horrifies me. Can the bitterest of ordeals really be threatening our country?

"It's better not to think of the future. We have no future... But our country certainly does have a future!..

"...Perhaps it's because I'm the director and look austere, not entering into conversation about the war and the difficulties we are experiencing, that for the last few days I haven't spoken to anyone of the events we're living through. My colleagues are all silent. Not one of them—neither S., nor I.L.—says a word about the events...

"Although with some effort, I have succeeded in getting the staff to organise their work in a semblance of normality. Now we all sit in one room—the reading room, where the stove's been installed. We keep it stoked up with all sorts of junk, and also waste paper. It's relatively warm too—about 8°C! Only just possible to work!

"29.10.41. Day 130. Two air raids this evening.

"Things are getting increasingly difficult as regards food. Today's dinner was exceedingly meagre. But it's boring to write about. So far it's only shortages, not hunger, so we can bear it. We must.

"31.10.41. Day 132. It's frightening enough as it is without the newspapers agitating, scaring people, quoting Hitler: 'It will be one of the chief tasks of German statesmanship for all time to prevent by every means in our power the further increase of the Slav races. Natural instincts bid all living beings not merely conquer their enemies, but also destroy them. In former days, it was the victor's prerogative to destroy entire tribes, entire peoples... We are obliged to depopulate ... as part of our mission of preserving the German population. We shall have to develop a technique of depopulation.' In addition to this, there are several columns of commentary in the paper. Reading it all would make your flesh creep, even if you had nerves of steel. Has there ever been a blacker period in the world since the advent of civilisation? I'd say not. True, there was cruelty, but it stemmed from savagery. Now it is refined barbarity coming from the



mind, from a perverted misdirection of technology and science towards destruction.

"1.11.41. Day 133. Had to make the last leg of the journey home under artillery fire. Academician Krachkovsky and his wife walked behind me along the embankment. He strode calmly, at his normal pace. M.F. greeted me joyfully, with relief: 'Well, here at last, I was beginning to worry.' We couldn't hear the firing from indoors, but the house shook as usual.

"There were two air raid warnings in the evening. My ears are still ringing from that oppressive music of the howling sirens.

"Supper was very meagre. As luck would have it, this time I felt very hungry.

"Between the air raids this evening, as well as during them, I read *Records of the Fatherland*, of the early 19th century. I keep adding new material to the sixth chapter of my history of the Academy of Sciences.

I still have difficulty coping with my inner alarm over the complete lack of hope for the future. I'm also quite worried about the protection of the Archives. I went round the whole of the repository today and drew up a mass of instructions. The staff are gradually succumbing. S., gloomy at the best of times, now reacts to everything with an unhealthy irritability. I even asked him if he was feeling ill. A.O. has a fixed, glassy stare now. Sh. is silent, immersed in herself. L. has resumed work, but is cautious, reticent and on her guard. She never comes out with what she thinks, what she feels inside, how she is coping with the situation. And suddenly I felt so bored, so alone in that room full of people all concealing something.



"7.11.41. Day 139 of the war. All day the radio's been transmitting speeches, music.

"I listened to another programme from Moscow—a speech made by Stalin during the parade in Red Square today. It turns out that tradition was not broken and at nine o'clock this morning the parade began, although it was an unusual one. Across Red Square marched troops setting off for the firing line and others returning straight from battle, having been relieved for a spell.

"Stalin's been silent for a long time and now he's suddenly made two speeches. One senses that there is some kind of turning point in the military situation. The Germans are throwing in all their forces, all their reserves—but we are not retreating any longer. We have nowhere to retreat to! Either we die, or we fight back and defend Moscow and Leningrad. There is no other option.

"A horrifying item has appeared in the newspapers. Knut Hamsun, that wonderful Norwegian writer, has come to the conclusion that it is impossible for Norway to be an independent country and has been won over to the side of the Quislings, i.e. towards complete collaboration with the National-Socialists.

"In its editorial *Leningradskaya Pravda* says: 'We have made many sacrifices... But the greatest sacrifice of all—Moscow—we shall never make.'

"The war will demand many more sacrifices and more time. Stalin says that there is no need, though, to exaggerate the strength of the enemy or the difficulties in the path of victory, as a few frightened intellectuals are doing.



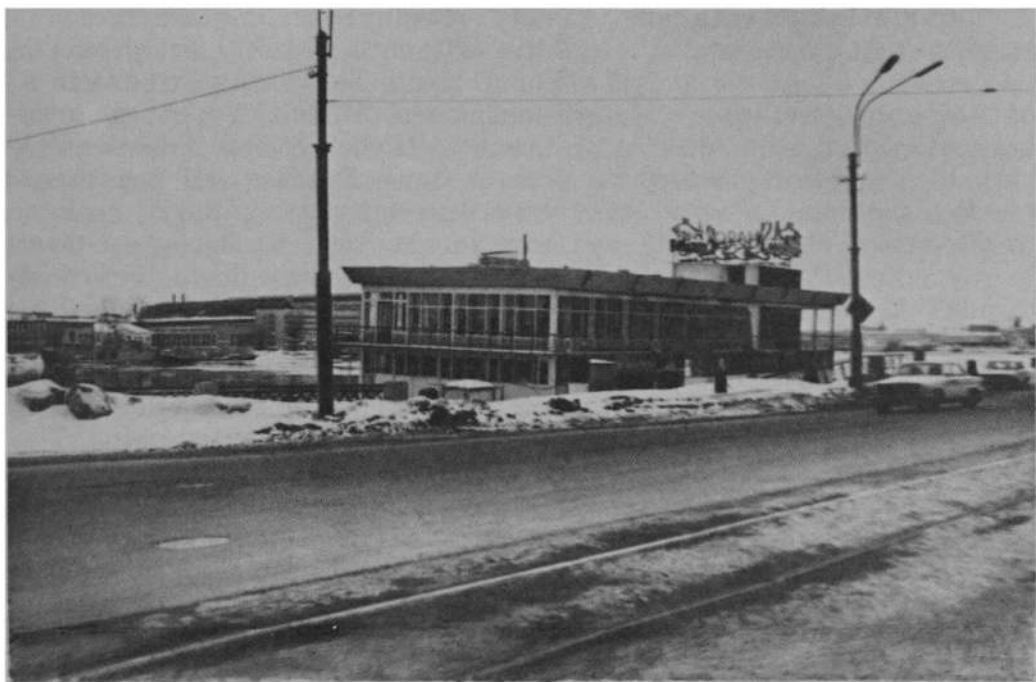
“War is ahead of us, nothing but war, waged to the point of total exhaustion of the enemy.

“The Germans are firing now.”

People like Knyazev have their own compass of powers, their own capacity to endure hunger and deadly fatigue of the body and mind. But at the same time they have a tremendous resource of human steadfastness, an extra humanist defence line, formed by real culture, genuine intellectualism. Weakness, egoism and despair could begin worming their way into his heart, too—but before they really penetrated, they had to negotiate their way through that very humanist defence line which, of course, young Yura Ryabinkin did not have. Yura found it a much more painful task to struggle with himself, with his own weaknesses. Things that Knyazev noticed and evaluated immediately, from a distance, Yura Ryabinkin would discover in himself only after the act. He would act first and only later understand, sum up, and repent of what he had done...

Knyazev's diary of the blockade is a tremendous work of the spirit, healing and injecting energy and hope. By working on it he continuously strengthened and expanded those extra defences which staved off hunger, cold and despair.

His diary was also the work of a historian. And it was something of a literary occupation, although embodying aspirations on a most modest and hesitant scale. As a true scholar, Knyazev was somewhat ashamed of himself in the capacity of a writer. He saw this occupation of his as a



The panorama from Knyazev's house.

secret weakness. Unlike the scholar and scientist, the writer is extremely vulnerable for he exposes to the reader his innermost secrets and this seemed a bit frightening to Knyazev. He was prepared to assiduously polish his verse-formulations (laconically expressed thoughts and sentiments), to eagerly adapt lines and even entire works of others that were to his liking ("... as I would do it"), searching out "his own thoughts" in others—earmarking everything (the poems as well as the diary) "for the archives". Here Knyazev's attitude to archives, as an archivist himself, must be borne in mind—to him it was as desirable a destination as print and publication were to others. Most certainly not a graveyard, quite the opposite—a place where his most respected writers, scientists and scholars still lived on in their handwriting, their words, their manuscripts...

"I've jotted down a short poem expressing the concentrated essence of my emotions, my moods. Here it is in its final edited form. Something that would have required dozens of pages of prose is expressed here in a few lines:

*On this unhappy day
Say nothing, my friend, nothing!
Words do not pay.
For the tears of those dear
Vengeance will follow.
The heartbeat's the word
The machine-gun the echo.*

"I follow events with great anxiety, greedily searching for threads to grasp, so that I can unravel the course of events. I react to everything on two levels—as a citizen and as a human being. That's why there seem to be so many contradictions, inconsistencies and difficulties in comprehending current and imminent, future events... Highways and crossroads are blurred. I'm terribly weary on that account. Reading the newspapers you get a picture of what we're experiencing from one angle; listening to all sorts of things people say, from another. And so, having sat down to my notes, I'm at a loss as to what I should write down. Following through ideas expressed from one angle means going in for heroics; putting on paper thoughts of a different kind would boil down to complaining...

"12.11.41. Day 144. Now it's not simply knocking on the door, it has stalked in with a rattling of bones—hunger.

"The food situation in Leningrad is bad. That's been reported over the radio and stated in the papers. 'The Bolsheviks are not hiding the truth from the people.' The situation is grave indeed. It will not improve until the blockade is lifted. From tomorrow the bread ration will be reduced not only for civilians, but for military personnel, too. There can be no question of surrendering the city 'to the mercy of the enemy', as some faint hearts have intimated. Leningrad must be defended, come what may. There can be no question of surrender! We'll just have to endure all the difficulties and suffering coming our way, including hunger..

"M.F. and I have accepted this latest phase in our life calmly. We'll either 'endure' it, or we'll die. But it's best not to dwell on the future. There'll be time to tackle the future when it comes.

"The Germans want to starve us to death. Will the four million of Leningraders withstand this great ordeal? But it's not only hunger they're using against us. Today there's good flying weather and there've been five air raids. During the last long raid this evening we could feel the house shaking once again. The house 'jumped'. That means a bomb must have landed quite close, and possibly more than one. M.F. and I stood up when the house started trembling, but sat down again to drink our evening tea. This morning the city was under artillery fire. So now we've got hunger, cold, bombing, and the whistling of shells over our heads.

"M.F. says: 'We'll endure anything, so long as we can push the Germans back.'

"16.11.41. Day 148. This morning we tried to give ourselves a wash and put some clean clothes on. We were unsuccessful—one after another the air raid sirens kept us on the alert. We started putting away all the things that might be sent flying—the screen, the pictures, the vases, the mirror, etc. The flat's beginning to look like a barn.

"At around four, as if according to timetable, the artillery shelling started. We hung some more rags across the windows, so that the glass wouldn't fly all over the place in the event of blast. I took the lamp from the desk in my study and stood it in the corner of the room; I put the clock on the mantelpiece right up against the wall. Almost in the middle of the room there's a box with sand, and by the fireplace a container

and a bucket full of water.

"Despite the frost, our neighbours have their windows open; there are bricks, clay and cement all over the floor; the floor's an absolute mess—covered with a thick layer of lime dust. The third day running the workmen have been constructing machine-gun embrasures in the windows overlooking the embankment. All the belongings of our neighbours are piled together, topsy-turvy. It's obviously impossible to live in such conditions. So the neighbours have settled themselves in the kitchen, which overlooks the courtyard.

"Evidently we'll also have to abandon our flat before long. I don't begrudge anything except my books and these notes, and the historical material and collections I've amassed. But before that we could be killed by a bomb or burnt down.

"The declaration by German soldiers taken prisoner states (*Leningradskaya Pravda*, 16.11.41):

" 'Woe to us, Germans, if Hitler's defeat occurs without our participation, without our active involvement. In that case no one will believe our declarations that we, Germans, are not responsible for Hitler's crimes.

" 'A people in whose name the atrocities take place, while it remains silent and obediently carries on the war, is a people worthy of neither compassion, nor aid...' "

The writer of these notes had come to know, to experience everything that befell the residents of Leningrad in the course of those days and months. Bombing, shelling and, on top of that, hunger (although he finds writing about hunger somehow degrading and also "boring"—remember his entry for October 29). But, as previously, he is still tormented by the question of what attitude to take towards a people, in whose name the whole of Europe, half the world, was being ravaged and torn apart...

SOMEONE ALWAYS MAKES NOTES

Back to Knyazev's diary:

"17.11.41. Day 149. Should I continue these notes? They seem to be turning into a very monotonous record of destruction caused by enemy air raids. I don't encompass many events as a contemporary observer, and my radius is too small to permit a more vivid and full description of those I do. I'm trying to extend my radius by giving the gist of reports in the newspapers, but should I? After all, I'm not taking on the job of historian, journalist or the like.

"...My other dilemma is whether to write about myself and my feelings. It could be an opportunity to portray myself as a hero, a man, who is firmly and bravely bearing up in the face of all ordeals. In reality I'm

enduring them with resolution, but dialectically, with great contradictions...

The top of Laval's building of the Central Archives looks like a shattered skull, just as terrible. Even a building has a physiognomy of its own! That handsome building has now become a dead carcass."

We have already mentioned that in this part of the book, as a rule, we are using genuine contemporary records. The majority are diaries, but many people have managed to save only fragmented notes, sketches, impressions of individual episodes—without dates, written at irregular intervals. Their authenticity also makes them important for us. They contain observations and word sketches.

Below are a few of the 1941-42 episodes from the notes of *Olga Rodstein*:

"The sky over the Neva is crisp, clear and blue. A flock of seagulls is bobbing on the water.

"A No. 12 (tram) is crawling across the Palace Bridge. It is packed. Wrapped in thick shawls, wearing heavy quilted jackets are women who manage to get hold of unobtainable foodstuffs, with sacks, bottles and large bundles. Women with faces round and shining like a samovar, and small, piercing eyes like coals on a flat tray.

"'Look at all those birds! Bet they're after the fish!'

"Pressing together, the women traders are feasting their eyes through the tram windows upon the magnificent scene of proud liberty and light down below the bridge. The seagulls, white as porcelain figurines, bob up and down with the waves. Others, fluttering their wings, descend to settle amidst their friends.

"'Local ducks, they must be,' explains a housewife. 'Someone ought to catch them all for soup!'

"And why not? Let seagulls be ducks, if a woman has the look of a hungry pike.

"Rastrelli decorated the roof of the Winter Palace with figures (a motley crew, it must be said). The crowd in the tram gazes intently at them:

"'Why are all those workmen on the roof?'

"...Hunger. Someone is insisting over the phone that the head of the canteen was wrong in cutting out a coupon for 100 grammes of meat because the rissoles contain 50 per cent bread. It has been decided to send the rissole to the chemical laboratory."

And alongside—a note for herself. "Heine does not write 'compose poetry', but says 'ein Gedicht erleben'."*

* Experience poetry (German).



*Olga Rodstein.
Spring of 1943.*

Olga Rodstein has an entire folder full of pieces like that. Sketches, pictures, conversations overheard, and the frightful, terrifying story of her mother's death, of how she had to bargain with the yardkeeper to lay out her mother in return for bread. There is still a multitude of unsorted notes, diaries, and letters connected with the blockade kept in family archives of Leningraders and in the city archives. Everyone who went through the blockade had a personal radius of observation, made attempts to comprehend the events and the terrible experiences.

But let us return to the pages of Knyazev's diary.

"29.11.41. Day 161. We can't think of Napalkova without loathing. It came to light that the day before she left she had been haranguing some exhausted 'whining intellectual', saying that every Leningrader must be on the alert and prepared to repel the enemy. 'Surely we can all pluck up enough courage to throw a petrol bottle at an enemy tank!' she had said with emotion. 'We must firmly stand our ground in Leningrad, we can't abandon the city at a time like this... It's our duty.' In the few hours before her plane flight she never even hinted to anyone that she was abandoning Leningrad, her colleagues and her fellow Party members.

"That case is especially painful because Napalkova had joined the Academy, the Party branch, after so many people had been unjustly accused of disloyalty and expelled from the Party, while she appeared to have earned herself a firm reputation (and even respect) as a strong and steadfast member of the Party.

"That's how those who go around talking big about self-sacrifice, brave deeds and heroism fix themselves up. Only a few days back Napalkova as a responsible member of the Party, was urging me to speak at a meeting of intellectuals and to say a few words on the duty of Soviet intellectuals to sacrifice everything for the sake of their country...

"Mankind's normal existence came to an end on June 28, 1914. That day signifies the beginning of the era in which we are now living. We (the Soviet people) have a sacred date—October 25, 1917, which we all took as the start of the new era of humanity's rebirth. That is how things were until June 22, 1941. On that day our terrible tragedy began.

"3.12.41. Day 165. We've had no electricity all evening. It's hard to write by the light of an oil-lamp.

"Work went badly today at the Archives. There was great agitation on account of the proposed evacuation. We received official notice of it this morning. Orbeli wants to leave with her three children (9, 12 and 15 years old), and Urmancheyeva, also with three children (1, 3 and 5 years), while Travina is undecided. The rest have refused. They would have to walk about 150-200 kilometres. Transport is promised for the children and baggage. Blind terror in the face of hunger is driving people to take enormous risk. Orbeli says: 'There's little to choose between starving to death here, or walking off—well, at least there'll be a slight possibility of survival.' She brought her three girls to the Archives. As I looked at them I thought of the great exodus awaiting these much-enduring Leningraders. They will have to walk through bitterly cold December or January nights, in frosts and snowstorms, through snowdrifts, with not a road in sight. A desperate move."

December 3, 1941—that day Pavel Filonov, the wonderful Soviet artist, died of starvation in his studio in the house on Karpovka. His sister, Yevdokia Glebova, told us how it happened.

"He lay aslant on the bed, a white mitten on one hand, the other bare. 'My sister and I were expecting the doctor. Our brother was unconscious. His wife, Yekaterina, was present. His death was silent. After he died, Toshchakov, the writer, came in. Pavel Filonov was so frail that Toshchakov easily lifted him (and Toshchakov was starved, too!) and laid him on the table to undress. We spent nine days in our brother's studio, we didn't bury him until the Artists' Union had helped us get a coffin and we'd got things arranged at the cemetery..."

We have yet to write of Yevdokia Glebova, whose story is a striking one, but for the time being we must point out that death through starvation at the beginning of December 1941 was relatively uncommon. Filonov died so early because even before this time he had half-starved himself and it was against his beliefs to accept any assistance—money, or food. He was thin and emaciated, and this was probably why he so easily succumbed to starvation.

The next entry in Knyazev's diary is:

"5.12.41. Day 167. It's Constitution Day. The trams are decorated with red flags, but not the buildings, for some reason.

"Again, as in 1919 and 1920, I met people in the street pulling coffins on sledges...

"Relatives of Valya, the girl we had wanted to adopt—the old mother and her son, wounded in the Finnish War and mentally deranged ever since, were found dead in their flat, the door of which had to be broken down.

"8.12.41. Day 170. Evening. Can't write anything in the light of the oil-lamp. I've lit a candle. Then we'll see... The benefits of civilisation are coming to an end, albeit temporarily.

"M.F. said, 'If it goes on like this, in January or February we'll be bound to die of starvation.' She said it calmly and added: 'But as such a death is painfully long we'll have to think of another way. You can kill me, and then yourself...' And that from the lips of M.F.—my cheerful, life-loving wife and friend..."

Knyazev's generation, all the old Petrograders, recalled the 1919-1920s. These comparisons arose through various associations. One such thing that served to remind people of those hungry years in Petrograd was the *burzhuika*—a small, iron stove which was usually placed in the centre of a room. Even the name *burzhuika*, coined in the old days was still used, although it had by then lost its underlying social implications. Words such as "rations", "wick-lamp" and "oil-seed cake" were back again...

THE FROZEN SPHINXES

Continuing Knyazev's record:

"...Every day the newspaper headlines include quote after quote from Stalin's speech. Today I read in the paper for December 1, which arrived eight days late, of 'terrified intellectuals'... Is that true, I wonder?

"Take that wretched Napalkova, hardly an 'intellectual', accusing everyone of faint-heartedness, intellectuality and cowardice—yet when it came to the crunch and things got really bad and difficult, she deserted everyone and fled from Leningrad.

"In October and November, despite the bombings and the cold, I was always full of enthusiasm and got on extremely well with my work, but in December everything's falling apart. And my colleagues are growing weaker, too. Materials, removed and dropped, have been lying on the floor of the repository for something like two weeks now. Three days ago L. walked on right into the repository with her cigarette. The cold has ousted us from the work-room, and now we all huddle beside the

stove in the room where the toilet is... A gloomy picture. But in all fairness, the staff are doing their stint on watch duty, spending one night a week at work, cold and half-starved. This job of keeping a watchful eye on valuable materials entrusted to us is a most important and necessary one.

"12 and 13.12.41. Day 174 and 175. Today my proud sphinxes seemed to me like a couple of miserable, naked pups thrown out into the bitter frost. As if forgotten by everyone, they stand overlooking the white expanse of the Neva...

"Yesterday it was impossible to seek protection under the portico of our house: the shells were exploding right across the Neva when we got home. Today, at the same hour they were falling somewhere further away. I strolled among the columns. I don't know why, but there seem to be fewer pedestrians here. Some people are searching for the evacuation centre and get worried when they can't find one; others ask where the social maintenance department is. These latter are invalids. Some of them are so weak and decrepit they can hardly walk. It's painful to see such human waste. Along the snow-covered embankment there still are tracks cleared for traffic. But only the odd lorry and the occasional car drive through—evidently they're ambulances or vehicles on special assignment.

"As I move or stand beside the columns, I am bound to see a picture that has become part of our daily life now: a newly-acquired empty coffin, hurriedly knocked together and unpainted is being pulled along on a sledge, or else one already containing a body with two or three people escorting the funeral sledge.

"I've heard that the cemeteries are filling up with many such coffins.

"From our columns there's an uninterrupted view of the Nikolayevsky Bridge. The overhead tram cables are broken in places and the trams don't travel across it. Only an endless black stream of pedestrians extends across it in both directions. My lonely sphinxes are in view, too, amidst the snowdrifts, with a lorry missing two of its wheels parked in front of them. It's been there for over two weeks now. Whether it was hit by a shell or just broke down, I don't know. But obviously there's nobody and no time to clear it away. So there it stands, that mechanical wreck, facing the guardians of millenia—the sphinxes from ancient Thebes in Egypt.

"I locked the double entrance doors. In the first door the glass panes are boarded up, in the second they have been smashed as a result of blast from shelling—one of them was broken within the last few days. The staircase is enveloped in darkness. No one's swept up for over a month, so there are cigarette ends, scraps of paper, sand and dust all around... When using the stairs we call out to make way for one another.

"We're living in the hallway of our flat these days. There's been no electricity for over a week now.

"It's becoming difficult at work with respect to some of our staff, who are growing weaker. It's freezing in the repositories, as it is in all the work-rooms. The electricity keeps failing, and then we sit in semi-darkness. It's pitch-black on the stairs without light, too, at such times. We can't keep the entrance doors locked because then we wouldn't hear if someone

knocked, and the bell doesn't work without electricity. Some of my colleagues and myself have been working in one of the projecting towers adjoining the Zoological Institute, where it's been relatively warm, but now it's very cold there as well. I was chilled to the bone there today, but stuck it out for five hours, working on the history of the heads of academic departments.

"I have deliberately concentrated in such detail on life within my small radius. I doubt if anyone's bothered to write such things down. As for life at the front, the lives of heroes, it will be revealed to a sufficient extent by others. One thing is demanded of us—to endure, overcome and last out till the breakthrough, till victory...

"And there's already good news from outside Moscow of a fresh blow dealt to the enemy. Hitler himself has announced that he is postponing the capture of Moscow till spring. The Germans have not found our winter to their liking. If only they would all freeze to death outside Moscow or Leningrad, or in the Ukraine, if only their communications were disrupted by gigantic snowdrifts. If only all these accursed ruffians invading our land, shelling daily our streets and squares, the residential areas of Leningrad, were to vanish from our soil. If they were to vanish like the Turkic tribe of the Avars who once ravaged Slavic lands... Maybe the rout of the German armies is already under way? Why can't their technology simply break down amid our snow-bound expanses! And then these thugs will get their just deserts for the atrocities they have committed. They won't escape their due...

"I'm ending this entry. I cast a worried look at my wick-lamp, my store of fuel is running out. I can't believe that soon I, too, will have to live through morning, evening and night in darkness, groping my way around the room!

"17. and 18.12.41. Day 179 and 180... At the front our troops are inflicting blow after blow on the German aggressors. They've been pushed back from the previously occupied sections of the Northern railroad (from Tikhvin to Volkhov). The October railroad is being cleared too. Only the Murmansk direction remains firmly in the grip of Finnish-German troops dug in at Petrozavodsk. There's a vast stockpile of food accumulated for Leningrad in Murmansk. This news is passed on by word of mouth; weakened and exhausted people are mustering their strength.

"But many no longer have any strength. Last night, near our academic building, by those very columns I mention so often, a man died. The house superintendent, Savchenko, saw a woman leading a man across the road. He could barely move and collapsed by the tramline—the woman got him back on his feet, and he took a few more steps, but didn't make it to the pavement. He fell by a mound of snow. By the time Savchenko got there the man was only a lifeless body. The woman, the man's wife, was fussing over the body. Passers-by, on learning what had happened, advised the woman not to let it be known that she was the man's wife, but to give the impression she was merely a stranger. It is then up to the militia to take the corpse and to dispose of it in the proper way. And that's just what she did. A militiaman stopped a passing sledge and the corpse was

hoisted onto it to be taken to the morgue. What happened to the woman who had lost her husband and was unable even to bury him, I don't know.

"Savchenko himself has a dejected look in his eyes. 'We're all bound to die, we'll never last out,' he said to me. 'That isn't so,' I tried to console him. 'We can bear up under it, as long as we still maintain the willpower to overcome the difficulties.' I talked to him for a long time, saying that we had to hold out, that we mustn't let fear get the better of us. I think it had some effect.

"It turns out that there's no one doing any watch-duty in our house, no one checking the attic areas. When I mentioned to Savchenko the instructions printed in *Pravda* on extinguishing incendiary bombs in winter-time, he only smiled sadly and replied: 'Who do you think's capable of it? No one has any strength left—of the yardkeepers, Alexander's laid up, bloated through starvation, the other one, Starikov, is too weak... We've no one in the building who can carry out those instructions.'

"And so we live, leaving everything to chance.

"At work watch-duty is also a problem—nobody there to carry out the instructions either.

"The atmosphere in the repositories, in the freezing cold offices, is gloomy... I wonder sadly why we're sitting here, why aren't we working in the factories, doing the jobs so necessary to the front? At the moment I'm finishing my report on the Academy's history. That, of course, could have waited.

"Multitudes of people have either left work themselves or have lost their jobs at offices and factories, and so one person per family is always occupied all day queuing... You can just imagine how many people have not been utilised in defence at all. Surely, these people ought to be taking to kitchen-gardening, fishing and the like this coming spring. I have always thought with regret that right under our noses we've the Neva River, within a few kilometres is Lake Ladoga with all its fish, yet even in peacetime we were short of fish! You could feed half the country on fish from the thousands of lakes in our parts! But no! And now, when it's virtually impossible to get supplies brought in, the people of Leningrad are bloated through starvation and dying.

"Tonight someone began hammering persistently on our door. Eventually we had to answer it. In burst Filimonov, a carpenter and a handyman, but someone who never fitted in very well in our academic institutions. Normally he held the post of head of supplies. He liked his drink a little too well. Some time ago, as he was mending my crutches, he kept laughing and saying he wanted payment in food, not money. He was a terrible sight tonight—long hair, black as soot. He was holding a lighted candle, and with it still in his hands, he fell on his knees, crying: 'Help me, I'm done for, I've lost my ration cards, give me some bread.' My wife was at a loss. What could we do? Give him our day's ration, i.e. one hundred and twenty five grammes? But that could hardly save him! What could we do to help him and how? I gave him thirty roubles, the price of 100 grammes of bread at the market. Filimonov took the money, telling us how painful, bitter and humiliating it had been for him to ask.

"This unexpected and dramatic incident really knocked us off balance.

I calmed down a bit later. Even in dire need I shan't go to anyone. Everybody else is in the same situation. If I have to die, I'll find enough will-power to kill myself first.

"The Christmas-tree candle from M.F.'s stock is burning low. We bought a dozen in 1933 for Christmas. They really came in handy now! It'll be Christmas soon—I'd say the gloomiest and most horrifying of the last 2,000 years. But in the USSR we've long got out of the habit of celebrating Christmas. In a couple of days a more significant yearly event in the life of our planet will occur—the Earth, having reached a point in its orbit most distant from the Sun, will once again be nearing it. A great festival of the life-giving sun!"

Could Knyazev have helped Filimonov in any other way? What could be done for someone who'd lost his ration cards? Yet enfeebled people would lose their cards or have them stolen.

Such cases put relatives and other people around in a moral dilemma, an intolerable one for it was impossible to solve.

HUNGER IS NO FRIEND, YOUR CONSCIENCE NOT YOUR NEIGHBOUR

Starvation had entered Yura Ryabinkin's life by now, relentlessly and irrevocably. For the first time he was overcome by the unfamiliar, degrading and ferocious feeling of hunger. We shall have to go back now and live through those months beginning with October, day by day, as we have done with Knyazev, but this time with a young lad—more defenceless in the face of the ordeals befalling him.

"21st October. Was on watch-duty at school from eight in the morning till six in the evening. Managed to somewhat allay my hunger. Or more accurately, to drown it (that is, fill his stomach with water—A.A., D.G.). During algebra I made the first entry in my notebook.

"Had another unpleasant conversation about food tonight. Hunger is no friend.

"Mum got her 150 grammes weekly ration of candy today which she gave (to repay a debt) to Anfisa Nikolayevna, who just said thank you and calmly took it all. Now all we've got left are 6 or 8 sweets to last us 10 days! And there won't be any left by tomorrow, that's for sure.

"On the various fronts the situation is awful. To top it all, there's now an offensive on the Taganrog sector. Is it possible that we won't be able to crush the German shock units and restore communications between Leningrad and the USSR before 1942?!

"If only I could be certain that the food and bread rations won't be reduced any further! If only! But they will. Probably by about half. And

all this on the eve of the October anniversary, the anniversary on October 25 (Nov. 7) of the greatest in history proletarian revolution!

"I've discovered that our reading-room at school contains many books on chess, including *A Modern Opening*.

"22nd October. Spent all morning hanging around in queues for beer. With great difficulty managed to get hold of two bottles, and got frozen feet into the bargain. Then used three coupons on cereal. Spent the evening on watch-duty at school. No air raids. The Germans have taken Taganrog. The German offensive goes on...

"Became totally absorbed reading Dumas' *La Dame de Monsoreau*. A most entertaining novel.

"Mother bartered the two bottles of beer for 400 grammes of bread. She sent me to queue up for more beer.

"23rd October. Got another two bottles of beer. Went to the cinema. Saw 'Saint Jorgen's Festival'. Read some more of *La Dame de Monsoreau*..."

"It's cold and hungry at home.

"24th October. Spent all day—from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. queuing up for beer, instead of being on watch-duty at school. I didn't even have time to go to the militia for my passport. Even after all that, I still didn't get hold of any beer. Mother came home in the evening and used another head of cabbage. Somehow or other, I managed to satisfy my hunger a little bit. The communiqués don't say anything new. Mother told me that the Trade-union's Central Committee has been evacuated to Kuibyshev. I can imagine the situation in Moscow.

"The tea ration is now 12.5 grammes per person a month, and no eggs at all. No fish either. Anfisa Nikolayevna's behaviour was curious today. She presented us with three pancakes made of carrot puree which she got from the trust canteen, and 10 candies. At least we had something to drink half a cup of tea with. Wrote a letter to Tina. Asked her to send us a parcel of rusks or flat potato cakes. I must start looking for a job. I'll have to forget about studying for the time being.

"Something strange's happening to Ira—day and night she's got blue swellings under her eyes, gets a stitch in her left side when she walks fast and can't keep any liquids (soup) down. Mother wants to take her to the doctor.

"Well, what surprise have the Germans in store? At any rate, they're threatening to burn Leningrad down in three days of continuous air raids (the rumour came from the Chistovs' who, because they work on the city outskirts, willy-nilly get to see the leaflets the Germans shower from planes).

"Queues everywhere—for beer, kvass, aerated water. And queues for pepper, salt (especially salt!), and mustard.

"The Germans have either moved their entire airforce over to the Moscow Front, or else are preparing an air raid for the anniversary of the October Revolution, wanting to turn our holiday celebration into a funeral day.

"It's only today that I've found out that for extinguishing incendiary bombs in our attic and courtyard I have been officially thanked by the

(...) trust management. I can't even remember when that was now.

"25th October. All I got after standing in queues was frozen feet. Nothing else. I wonder if the lemonade being sold in the bars is prepared with saccharin or natural juices?

"All I want is to sleep, sleep, eat, eat... Sleep and eat, sleep and eat... What else does a human being need? Yet, when a person is well fed and healthy, he yearns for something else, and so on ad infinitum. A month ago I wanted, or rather, yearned for bread with butter and sausage, yet now all I crave is bread...

"Tina has sent by post, almost simultaneously, two more money orders: 200 and 210 roubles. She must have got another stripe or two—become an army doctor, 1st class. It's quite possible.

"Today I'm missing my watch-duty at school for the second time and on the 27th (if I'm still alive and kicking) I'll have to miss another turn.

"Who would have suspected that events could take such a turn? Thinking of what's to come makes my hair stand on end—cold, starvation, shelling, bombing, exhausting (...) nights, days, twenty-four hour stretches, followed by (...) bacteria, with those surviving the first day, dying of hunger—all the food in the shops having been poisoned... I'm afraid of thinking any further ahead, to remain in Leningrad after that means certain death.

"Mum tells me that now isn't the time to keep a diary, but I'm still going to. (It's important to note that his mother knew of the existence of the diary!—A.A., D.G.) If I don't get the chance to re-read it, someone else will do that and will find out what kind of person this Yura Ryabinkin was, and will laugh at this person... For some strange reason a phrase from Gorky's *Klim Samgin* has come to mind: 'But maybe the boy never existed?' A human being lives and then he is no more. A folk riddle asks: What's the shortest thing in the world? And the reply is: human life. Maybe one day I would have taken up philosophy. But now that requires 1) food and 2) sleep. That is the explanation of all idealism: for it to exist it must have a sound materialist basis.

"26th October. We've money enough, and yet we're starving.

"29th October. I can hardly drag my feet, I'm so weak, and climbing the stairs is a tremendous feat for me. Mum says my face is starting to get puffy. All through lack of food. Tonight Anfisa Nikolayevna came out with an interesting remark: 'For the present everyone is an egoist, no one thinks of tomorrow, and so eats whatever he can today.' And she's right, the smarty cat.

"I wrote Tina another letter today asking her to send us a small parcel of flat potato cakes, oil-seed cake, etc. I can't believe such a parcel is an impossibility! I must adjust myself to the hunger, but I can't. So what shall I do?

"I don't know how I'm going to be able to get on with studying. I wanted to sit down to do some algebra in the next few days, but instead of formulas, loaves of bread keep floating round in my head.

"I should be re-reading Jack London's story *Love of Life*. A wonderful piece, and it would do me good in my present state of mind. Rumour has it that all the rations for November are the same. They haven't increased

even the bread ration. Mum told me that even if the Germans are driven off, the rations will remain the same...

"The Germans are bound to launch continuous air raids on the 7th and 8th of November. And as a prelude they'll torture the population with artillery shelling and bombing. Surely they are preparing us a holiday surprise.

"I'm none too fussy about myself now. I sleep in my clothes, just rinse my face a bit in the mornings. I don't wash my hands with soap, don't bother to change my clothes. Our flat is freezing and dark, a candle being our only light at night.

"But what bothers me most, what makes me feel worst of all is that here I am, hungry and cold, living amid fleas, yet next door is a room where life is completely different—where there's always bread, porridge, meat, chocolate and warmth, where an Estonian paraffin lamp is burning brightly and people live amid comfortable furniture... This is envy—the feeling I have at the thought of Anfisa Nikolayevna—but I can't help it.

"I have no one I can visit. My friends? I haven't any. Volodya's in Kazan, Misha at work. As for those (...), they're egoists through and through, why should I go to them? But there's that envy again, and even spite, a sharp, bitter sense of injustice.

"31st October, 1st November. What can I say about these last days? On the 31st I felt incomparably better than I had before. Aunt Natala treated me to some mustard pancakes, even Anfisa Nikolayevna gave us 150 grammes of cereal (we have six coupons left, three of which I've got for my dinners).

"At night there was an air raid alert. The ack-ack guns kept barking, but the Germans didn't drop any bombs. Over the last two days they have kept up incessant shelling of the city. I said that the Germans have shifted all their long-range artillery from the English Channel to Leningrad. Today, the 1st, I had an unpleasant incident—I wasn't allowed into the trust canteen until 2 o'clock. And by then the canteen had run out of mashed potatoes and I had to be content with two bowls of thick lentil soup. Bought 3 small bottles of cough medicine. It's a mixture of rum and valerian and aniseed drops, an exceedingly sweet and nourishing liquid—I've already drunk two bottles, there's one left now...

"3rd, 4th and 5th November. These last three days I had lessons at school. The requirements are less stringent, only a few of the old teachers are left. The others are from school No. 213. The school canteen is working now. Soup's not on ration cards—one bowl per person, everything else is on coupons.

"Every night there's an air raid. Bombing. Last night, three German aircraft were brought down over the centre of the city. Their artillery keeps up a steady fire. And there's the holiday to come. What kind of a 'holiday' are the Germans going to treat us to? Poison gas, without a doubt... For four days, as from the 6th or 7th, all the city's sanitary cleansing stations are at the ready. Something's going to happen!

"I was supposed to have read Gogol's *Dead Souls* for today, but it's impossible to read in the dim candlelight. My writing's automatic. There's not much new I know. Everyone's saying that 'the 24th anniversary will



The staircase in Yura Ryabinkin's house.

decide everything...'

"What is a human being and what is his life? What is it after all? 'Life's not worth a kopek'—the ancient proverb tells us. How many people have lived before us and how many of them have had to die... But it's good to die feeling and knowing that you have achieved all your dreams from childhood and youth, good to die knowing that you have left successors to carry on your literary and scientific work, but how difficult it is... What is Hitler counting on? On building an empire, the very concept of which will be cursed by future generations. And just because of some bunch of adventurers millions upon millions of people are losing their lives! People! Human beings!!!

"It's late already. Their artillery fire has died down for the moment. The candle's burning low. Hunger, cold, darkness, dirt, lice and the prospect of a crimson future, wrapped in a dark shroud."

The city was preparing for winter. Hydrographer Yevgeni Churov was carrying on with his work:

"The early freezing of the water on the River Svir and on Chornaya Satoma, in the upper reaches of the Neva, has given reason to predict that the winter of '41/42 would be a harsh one.

"I had at my disposal the records of the Valaam monks... The monks made daily observations of the fluctuation in the level of the White Sea and Lake Ladoga. Around the year 1300, one monk—the monastery's

Father Superior (I've forgotten his name)—kept the record of the weather changes, noting when the ice formed into a solid crust, what kind of ice it was, whether it was possible to break through it, and also of the pilgrims making their way to Valaam, who fell through the ice, and whether the pilgrims arrived from the direction of Shlisselburg or Chornaya Sato-ma. All this information has indirectly assisted in the reconstruction of the situation with regard to ice formation.

"I had begun the review of these records on my own initiative. And from them I reached the conclusion that this coming winter was almost certain to be a severe one—the lake freezing solidly over, thereby making it possible to take troops even across the northern part of Lake Ladoga. The task of breaking through the blockade, the encirclement, had become an obvious one to any officer, any commander, and to a hydrographer like myself, it was especially clear that we needed to apply all our knowledge to this project. The comparison of the records of the Valaam monks and those of the North-Western navigation office has helped to establish the pattern of change in ice formation."

Lake Ladoga would not freeze, the winter of 1941-42 was approaching unhurriedly, although those who were preparing the Road of Life would have liked to speed up, urge on the flow of time itself which seemed so slow and inexorable. And the Allies appeared to be in no hurry to open the Second Front.

Yura knew nothing of the future ice route across the Ladoga and so could not think or write about it. But he records anything he had heard or read about the Allied Forces.

"6th, 7th November. I don't know what the situation at the front is. They say that Stalin made a speech in which he explained the reasons for our retreat, caustically remarking that at the present moment the assistance of the USA and Britain was negligible and that we were practically fighting Germany on our own. I really must try and find out more about this speech.

"The lessons at school are still going on, but I don't like them somehow. We sit at our desks in our thick winter coats, many of the pupils don't do any homework at all. It's interesting to note that in literature lessons they describe the characters from *Dead Souls* exactly as they're described in the textbook—those that are written about at all. Some of the class haven't even read *Dead Souls*...

"It seems that we haven't any rice porridge left, which means complete starvation for three days. I'll hardly be able to move about, if I stay alive at all. Gone back onto water. I'll get bloated, but what the hell... Mum's ill. And it must be serious for her to admit it. She's got a cold, a cough with vomiting, she's wheezing, has a fever, a headache...

"I'm probably ill too. Also have a fever, headache and cold. I must've caught a cold when I had to walk through three backyards without a coat



or hat on during the last watch-duty at school. And that was at midnight when it was freezing...

"I can't seem to get down to studying at all. I've got no desire whatsoever to learn anything at the moment. My head's solely occupied with thoughts of food, the bombings and the shellings. Yesterday I picked up the rubbish basket, carried it out into the yard and barely made it back up to the first floor. I felt as exhausted as if I'd actually been dragging a hundredweight for a full half hour behind me—it took a fair while for me to get my breath back after I sat down. There's an air raid at the moment. The ack-ack guns are going like mad. A few bombs have been dropped as well. According to the clock it's five minutes to five. Mother comes in soon after 6 p.m.

"9th and 10th November. Every night in my sleep I see bread, butter, pies and potatoes. And before I go to sleep there's always the thought in my head that in twelve hours the night will be over and I can eat a piece of bread... Mum keeps assuring me every day that all she and Ira consume apiece are two glasses of hot tea with sugar, and half a bowl of soup a day. No more. Plus a bowl of soup in the evenings! All the same I (...). Ira, for example, sometimes even refuses an extra bowl of soup in the evenings. And both of them keep telling me that I eat as much as a worker does, pointing out that I have two portions of soup in the canteens, and more bread than they do. My whole character seems to have changed drastically. I've become groggy and feeble, as I write my hand shakes, when I walk I feel so weak at the knees it seems that even one more step will be more than I can take."

In the course of those very same days the head of the Leningrad Soviet's trade department was reporting to the City's Party Committee Secretary A.A. Kuznetsov that even if they resorted to the strictest rationing, there was only enough flour for eight days, and cereals for about nine.

By the evening of November 8 the news came that the enemy had cut the rail line near Tikhvin, the route along which provisions for Leningrad were carried to Lake Ladoga. On November 9 the State Defence Committee in Moscow took the decision—a desperate one in the circumstances—of allocating an additional 24 transport planes and 10 heavy bombers for delivering food supplies to Leningrad.

HUMAN LIMITS

Gradually Yura's contemplations were becoming more limited, focusing on food, warmth, physical comforts. The same thing was experienced by many other starving Leningraders—that was yet another borderline they'd overstepped. But there would be another and yet another one, until the mind disintegrated in many cases. But some people were able to sustain

till the end their sense of duty, honour, gratitude and compassion, and despite the circumstances to remain human beings. Some were able to do this, others were not.

The lives of those in the grip of the blockade differed, as did the way they reacted to starvation. And the way they faced death varied, too. Some died as befitted a human being, and today they are remembered with sorrow and compassion by the boys and girls of those days. But there were others who are remembered differently—some with contempt, still others with horror. Yet always with pain for the image of man. It is perhaps a kind of Judgement Day sentence pronounced on earth by human memory.

Yes, there were also those (and it was virtually inevitable in a starving city of several million people), who crossed the final boundary beyond which lay animal egoism, cruelty, hunger-induced insanity.

It is, of course, easier and more convenient not to remember that. But we would not then be able to comprehend the value and the heights of humanity achieved by those people—and they were in the majority—who held out, who did not transgress that final limit. We would not be able to see, to understand what a terrible inner conflict a human being had to go through before he managed to conquer the unbearable hunger, the cold, death and despair.

Olga Bergholtz copied out the following extract from the diaries of *M.M. Krakov*, chief engineer of factory No. 10 (Volodarsky district):

“Close to the mill I witnessed the following scene.

“A man walking in front of me was holding the hand of a little girl of three or four. Suddenly the little girl fell over. She began crying and through her tears I could hear her saying:

“‘Daddy, I’m hungry. Give me something, Daddy!’

“The man stared at her in confusion, incoherently muttering words of comfort. He tried to pick her up in his arms. But his attempts were futile. He was too weak himself. I looked into his face. It was swollen, the skin transparent.

“A woman stopped nearby. She was clasping a small bundle to her chest. Nowadays such bundles contain bread.

“The woman also tried to persuade the little girl. When her efforts had had no effect, a passerby said casually, ‘Give her some bread and she’ll be all right.’

“The woman was thoughtful. This must have lasted all of a minute. Then with a determined gesture she unwrapped the bundle, broke a small piece off her small chunk of bread and gave it to the little girl. Immediately after that she left.

“I caught up with her within a few minutes. When I turned round to look at her, I saw tears in her eyes—not tears of pity for the child, tears of pity for herself.

“Maybe she had a hungry child waiting at home... More likely than not, I’d say for certain...”

Georgi Knyazev, Yura Ryabinkin, Lydia Okhapkina, Faina Prusova, and the elderly woman whose diary was discovered in Yaroslavl overcame the harshest of circumstances in different ways, but all of them managed to sustain and even strengthen the finest, the most human side of themselves...

What united them was that each possessed or had sought and found a vital fulcrum not only within himself, but also in his work, some occupation, or interest he had. Most of them saw their main task in the struggle against the fascists, the defence of Leningrad—it was this, first and foremost, that helped sustain people. Then again, everyone had their immediate obligations, duties and responsibilities. Faina Prusova's were to the wounded in the hospital and to her children; Yura Ryabinkin's to his mother and little sister; Lydia Okhapkina's to her small children; Georgi Knyazev's to Lomonosov, Mendeleyev, etc. who had "entrusted" their manuscripts to his charge...

People would probably have despaired, given up if they had had only themselves to think of. But there was something more besides. Here is an extract from Faina Prusova's diary:

"When I returned home from work my heart would miss a beat at the mere thought of what I might find... I'd go in, find them—still alive, hanging on, and I'd hurriedly heat some water, make them get up and give their faces a wash. I'd then take a can and go down to the Neva for water and we'd drink some warm water with a small crust of bread (Faina Prusova even drew this 'crust' in her diary—all of a square centimetre in size!—A.A., D.G.). And I'd keep telling them lies that the enemy had been surrounded—a good job they believed me. I'd chuck all sorts into the stove—books, rags... Nadya said, 'Mummy, if I start dying, I'll do it very quietly, so that I don't frighten you!' I shouted, 'Live, my little snow-maiden!' She was as cold as ice all over...

"I keep everything spick and span at home, thinking it will help our morale. I serve everything on plates and heat the water to wash the dishes.

"Yes, people eat cats, dogs, or rather, they've eaten them.

"I'm so glad that Borya and Nadya haven't lost their human image."

We have already used extracts from the diary of *Alexei Belyakov* in the first part of this book. A man, you might think, whose thoughts were solely occupied with what he had eaten, how much and what he had got on ration in the shop, what they had put into the soup in the canteen. Numbers, plates, grammes, and mittens he couldn't get anyone to make for him... But no, those are not the only things that interest him and keep him going, it is not by bread alone that this man manages to sustain himself. On the actual amount of bread that he got, he would probably have died long before...

"January 13. Bought Tynianov's *Collected Works* for 8 roubles and Kiselyov's *Geometry* for 20 roubles.

"January 16. Yesterday bought Sologub for 3 roubles at the Maltsevsky market.

"2.2.1942. Bought the book *Hellenic Culture* edited by Professor Zelin-sky (40 roubles) and *Reader on the History of Western Theatre at the Turn of the XIX-XXth Centuries* (15 roubles)."

By which time he was already suffering from dystrophy. His face had swollen, he was living without water, without light. It makes you wonder what he wanted with books at that time, why, instead of the vital and such yearned for bread, he goes in search of, and buys, books. And random books at that, the sort that would not come in useful for quite some time, if ever.

But it was precisely at this point, on the verge of death, that this man envisaged a fuller life than he previously had judging by the diary.

"My library is filling up with magnificent books. Will I have the chance to use them or not? How I wish I could rearrange my life, apply my remaining energy (is it still possible to recoup the energy lost, or is this it?)."

That's where he searches for his vital point of support, to enable him to hold on, to prevent his slipping into the abyss—from physical to moral degeneration.

Addressing himself in his diary to his daughter, who had left Leningrad, forewarning her that they might never see one another again, he—as his last wish—asks her to purchase the remaining volumes of *The History of Russian Literature*. It would have given him pleasure to complete reading *The History*, but as it seems likely he will not get the chance, he would like his daughter to have the volumes...

As for the elderly woman who died in evacuation in Yaroslavl, her vital support throughout the blockade was simple, age-old—faith in God. We do not know this woman's name, but we were given her diary, found in Yaroslavl, written in a large ledger. She was a believer. Apart from God, she also believed in good, responsive human beings—she believed people like that would help, would come to her assistance when she was in real distress. And in fact, according to her diary, that was what happened—a kind person like herself always came across other people who were equally kind to her. Among those kind ones she included God, whom she occasionally gave hints on how to direct her future—"I think as You've kept me going through all this horror that, obviously, my life is still of some value to someone or something."

She was helped by people, by God, and even the dreams of this kindly elderly woman abounded in helpful and sympathetic images.

Next door to her lived a young woman, driven to the point of insanity



by hunger—a terrible reminder of the abyss. Unable to withstand the ordeal thrust upon her, she had broken down, collapsed. With madness in her eyes she would snatch the bread from her own child. Yet something was still working away at the back of her mind, through some effort of will the light began to shine forth from within. And suddenly the human being reemerged, as the elderly diarist records:

“18.3. What rejoicing there is today. Natasha woke me up during the night, exclaiming joyously: ‘Dear M.E., I’m better now, my mind is clear and I feel so happy.’ It really made me cry with joy. Thank God, she’s come to her senses. She seems not to remember anything that happened—how she took food and bread away from her child and myself, nor what we said to her, nor who visited her. ‘It all felt as if it were a dream instead of reality, and I kept thinking I was still asleep.’ Goodness, how incredibly mental disorders can reveal themselves! She couldn’t go back to sleep for sheer joy and talked continuously, recalling her illness. And she spoke quite normally, like the Natasha of old...”

No one who had even once seen the city in blockade conditions could ever forget the sight of its streets, its atmosphere filled with the swishing of shells, forget that uncanny combination of war, which was not being waged somewhere on the city outskirts, but seemed to have penetrated right into the heart of the city, and its everyday life—the daily routine of a city with its queues, its black market, factory work...

All the famous St Petersburg architectural ensembles remained in their places, the bridges, embankments and palaces as majestic as ever, with, as one Leningrader aptly put it, the one difference that instead of arousing lofty sentiments their ghostly incongruity had become oppressive. "...They proved that not only could they accept death and desolation, they could become part and parcel of it, together with the famous soil of Leningrad and the burnt-out carcasses of houses."

The blockade does not disappear, as do many other events, into the quiet backwaters of the past, to be resurrected only from time to time. The blockade has one very special quality about it: it remains by our side, even if at a distance, as something that must always be kept in mind. From time to time you confront yourself and others with its reality.

There were corpses in the street, in the houses—they became a feature of blockade life. The mass scale of death, its commonplace character, engendered a sense of the frailty and insignificance of human life, destroyed the meaning of every desire, every thing. Man was revealed in all his imperfections, he was physically humiliated, proved morally vulnerable. How many people were unable to stand the ordeal and lost their human dignity.

One man we talked to, tall and handsome, had the capacity to listen thoughtfully as well as to thoughtfully voice his very own experiences. He asked us not to print his name. With force and conviction he spoke not only of himself but, inclusive in his use of the collective pronoun "we", of others. His opinion was that the first to die were those in a weaker physical state, through either bad health or with age, followed by those of honest and generous disposition who were unable to adjust to the circumstances in which callousness and a hardening of heart were imperative to survival.

"After the blockade I visualised the world in the shape of a beast of prey lying in wait. I had only been eleven at the start of the blockade. It is difficult to withstand the pressures of extreme circumstances at that age. They imposed their standards and values upon you as the only ones possible. I grew to be suspicious, hard and as unjust to people as they had become to me. As I looked at them I would be thinking, 'Oh yes, you're pretending for the moment to be kind and honest. Yet, take away your bread and warmth and light and you'll all turn into two-legged wild beasts.' And it was during the first few years after the blockade that I did a few abominable things which to this day lie heavily on my conscience. It took almost a decade for me to become rehabilitated. Up till about the age of twenty I felt that something inside me had grown irreversibly old and I looked upon the world with the gaze of a broken and all-too-experienced person. It was only in my student years that youth came into its own and the fervent desire to become involved in work beneficial to mankind enabled me to shake off my morbid depression. But my old childhood belief in the unquestionable omnipotence and perfection of the human race, which had been destroyed by the blockade, never returned."

The circumstances of the life of that boy during the blockade were such that he found himself unwanted, left to fend for himself. In cases like that any moral sense of the deprivations experienced was lost, consequently, reserves of spiritual stability dried up faster and resistance to hunger was weakened. His words, his extreme opinions represent that opposing point of view which certainly exists, although is perhaps not generally expressed in so extreme a form. The stories of Yura Ryabinkin, Knyazev and most of the other people featured in our book are at variance with it. But in order to dispute it, that opposing point of view must be formulated. It cannot be denied, but it can be resisted. Consequently, that man's frankness was particularly valuable to us.

The blockade was an extreme, he insisted, it came outside, or, more precisely, was a lapse from the bounds of average, everyday, run-of-the-mill life, which sets its high and low limits upon human behaviour. The range of human feelings and actions increased at either end, fluctuating between extremes of heroism and degeneration—baseness and inhumanity.

But it is interesting that even our polemicist comes ultimately to the conclusion that man's moral resources were of primary importance here. The blockade, apparently exposing man at his most repulsive and at his most admirable, helped understand the decisive significance of the moral and ethical fibre of the human spirit.

Of all the diaries we have read, Yura Ryabinkin's most vividly demonstrated the need for those caught up in the blockade to pass judgement not only on others, but on themselves also, truthfully—even harshly. The diary helped him to keep going, giving him the opportunity to look at himself with the eyes of a stranger, to critically appraise his own behaviour. It was as if he were pouring out his heart to an imaginary listener, indirectly reproaching and censuring himself through his diary. In a way, the diary became his conscience, talking to him, Yura, in his own, and yet not his own, words. Honest and reflective by nature, he anxiously monitored his own behaviour.

We remember his agitation the time he won money at cards. Or in what little esteem he held his heroic behaviour on the roof of his house and the certificate of thanks he received for his prompt action in extinguishing incendiary bombs. And remember how, weak and ill, he stood for long periods in endless, hopeless queues—getting rations for all the family. After which he had to carry home those pitiful "biscuits" and "sweets" made out of inadequate substitutes—without eating them up on the spot. What a complex, incredibly difficult task it must have been—to have in your hands something you could eat and yet not eat it—a task only to be understood by those who have really been starving.

Klavdia Dubrovina, even as she speaks of it today, is still astonished at her own behaviour the time she found herself with a large quantity of sweet and edible medicine in her hands.

"In our OGB* we all acquired a passion for one laxative—we would buy it and drink it down with hot water.

* OGB—the Russian abbreviation for Detached City Battalion.



“Because it was sweet you mean?”

“Yes, it was quite sweet, it had saccharin in it. Then, once our lot asked me, I remember it quite clearly, to go and buy seventy tablets (there were seven of us, so that meant a packet of ten tablets for each). And so seven people gave me their money (it only cost a few kopeks) asking me to get some for them, too. I bought the stuff and was on my way back when I found I just couldn’t restrain myself. It was a fair distance to go—from Bolshoi Prospekt, Svyaz Street on the Petrograd side to Lev Tolstoy Square, you know! And our barracks were right here, where the electric equipment factory is now... And so while I was making my way back I managed—one tablet at a time—to consume most of it! I kept wanting another, and another—I just couldn’t stop myself...”

She couldn’t check herself, although this was not bread or sugar, but simply sweetened pills, an illusion of food. After that the doctor barely succeeded in restoring her health, all the while reproaching her. An educated person, how could she have taken thirty tablets! (This was the scaled-down quantity she had admitted to, not daring to reveal the true number.)

Dubrovina’s tale shows that it is not always possible even for an adult to show self-control. Yet Yura Ryabinkin, a youngster, was expected—having stood for many hours in queues—to bring all the “biscuits” home without eating any. Gradually his diary becomes witness to an agonising struggle incomparable with any other, with himself, with his feeling of shame before his mother. At one and the same time a witness and a statement. The diary was now Yura’s ally in his unequal struggle with hunger that was gnawing at him from within.

"9th and 10th November. I am sure that I could get used to it all if it were not for the proximity of well-fed individuals. But when every sound, almost (...) smacks of something cheerful, of satisfied stomachs, when in front of me, as I sit in the kitchen, I can see on the stove saucepans containing remains of dinners, suppers and breakfasts left by Anfisa Nikolayevna, I just can't take it any more... I feel as if I'm being torn apart, not literally, of course, but that's how it seems... And the smell of bread, pancakes and porridge tickles my nostrils, as if to say: 'Look! Just look! But you go hungry, you can't have it...' I've got used to the shelling, used to the bombing, but I can't get used to this—I can't!

"No changes at the front. Only on the Kalinin sector have our units advanced a few kilometres. The enemy is very reluctant to surrender its positions outside Leningrad.

"Yet again my ears are assaulted by Anfisa Nikolayevna's happy laughter... Last night Mother borrowed a small piece of sugar from Anfisa Nikolayevna and wants to borrow a piece from the Katinskys today. But today is the 10th, the last day of this ten-day period. Tomorrow we'll have our own sugar and bread ... bread! Just one night away...

"We still haven't used up the coupons for the last 10 days, entitling us to 400 grammes of cereal, 615 grammes of butter, and 100 grammes of flour ... but those things are not to be found anywhere. Whenever they're available hundreds and hundreds of people queue up in the street, in the bitter cold, but then they bring out (...) food enough for something like 80 or 100 people. Yet people stand there, freezing, and go away empty-handed in the end. They get up at 4 in the morning, queue in shops until 9 in the evening, and don't get anything. You feel sorry for them, but what can you do. There's an air raid on at the moment. It's been going for two hours now. Necessity, hunger drive you to the shops, out into the bitter frost, to stand in queues, in the human crush... Spend some weeks doing that and you won't care about anything any more. You're left with a feeling of blunt, cold indifference to everything going on around. Not enough to eat, not enough sleep, you're too cold, and as if that weren't enough—you've got to study. I can't. I'll let Mother decide what I'm to do. If she hasn't the strength to make the decision—I'll have to make it myself. And the evening ... what does it hold in store? Mother and Ira always come home hungry, frozen and tired... They can hardly drag their feet along. No food at home, no firewood for the stove... They start scolding and reproaching me because the neighbours downstairs have managed to get cereal and meat, and I haven't. Because there was meat in the shops, but I didn't get any. And Mother shrugged helplessly, made an innocent face and said, almost cried out: 'Well, I'm busy too, I'm working. I can't get anything.' So it was back to the queues for me, and to no avail. I realise that it's only me who can get food, can restore all three of us to life. But I haven't enough energy, enough strength to do it. Oh, if only I had a pair of felt boots! But I haven't... And each queue takes me one step nearer to pleurisy, to illness... I've decided I'd rather be puffy and swollen from dropsy. I'll drink as much as I can. At the moment I've got swollen cheeks. One more week, another ten days, a month, and if I'm not killed by a bomb before the New Year,

then I'll become bloated.

"I sit and cry... I'm only sixteen! Bastards, those who instigated this war...

"Farewell, childhood dreams! You'll never return, I won't let you. I'll shun you as I would a rabid dog, or someone who has the plague. If only the past could be erased from memory, so that I had no idea what bread or sausage were! So that I couldn't be intoxicated by thoughts of past happiness! Bliss! That's the only word to describe my former life... Peace of mind about one's future! What a feeling! And I'll never experience it again...

"How I would like Tina to be able to read my diary in her room in 'hlisselburg over a cup of tea and a sandwich! I bet she's never had to experience anything like our present life in Leningrad.

"This evening after the air raid I went to the shop on Sennaya Square. In a hand-to-hand combat, in an impossible crush that made adults cry out, groan and sob, I managed, at the cost of incredible physical effort, to fight my way to the counter without having to wait my turn and to get 190 grammes of butter and 500 grammes of sausage, made of horse-meat and soya. When I arrived home I had sharp pains in my chest, just like those I felt two years ago. And I've already got dry pleurisy. The pains are sharp, identical to those before. What torture! Tomorrow I must go to the T.B. clinic. I don't want to die of pleurisy just yet, why should I? But what can I do? What? I'm powerless... There are only two effective treatments for pleurisy: 1) nourishing food with plenty of fats and 2) dry, clean, warm air. Both of those are out...

"Mother and Ira have had 'breakfast' and are going to work. I'll go to the T.B. clinic, but that'll be later in the day. First I shall have breakfast 'in comfort and warmth'. And read.

"...Today I managed to get four litres of beer on coupons and handed them over to Anfisa Nikolayevna. Out of that she gave me half a litre to drink. I quite liked it. In fact, were things as they used to be, I'd soon turn into an honest-to-god alcoholic."

He carefully—down to the last gramme—counts up the unused coupons for cereal, potato flour, remembering that there is still 50 grammes of chocolate in reserve in the house... If only there was a shop where he could get what they were entitled to on the coupons!

"But I've forgotten to mention the most serious thing. Mother's legs have swollen up and have become as hard as stone. That's how things stand!

"Tomorrow I should be going to the T.B. clinic, the one Anfisa Nikolayevna goes to. It's near Maltsevsky market, where there's shelling every day.

"...An order from Hitler as quoted by *Leningradskaya Pravda*: 'Bearing in mind the significance of forthcoming events, especially the cold winter and the bad material provisioning of the army, I hereby give the order to

do away, in the nearest future, at any cost, with the Bolshevik capital Moscow'.

"I absolutely must be in the queue by 5 a.m. (...). All our nerves are in shreds. It's been a very long time since I heard a calm word from Mother. Whatever subject crops up in conversation, there's cursing, shouting or hysterics on her part. The reason... There are many reasons—there's the hunger, and the ever-present fear of shelling and bombing. Now our family—three people in all—is having constant disagreements and large-scale quarrels... Mother'll be sharing something out, and Ira and I will watch like hawks to see if she's exact... I can't tell you how it pains me to write down such things."

Yura, understandably, puts the blame on his mother, for who else could a child blame? But he immediately checks himself, vindicates her and forces himself to understand the causes of her irritation. It is a great thing—to make oneself understand another person—especially in a state, it would seem, of frenzied hungry egoism. It also disturbs Yura that he has started to see his mother in a different light—hard and unkind. He is disturbed, too, by the way he himself greedily and mistrustfully watches her sharing out the bread. Yura keeps up his high moral standards. At one point he and a friend caught and ate a stray cat, and he is then tormented by the thought that he is no longer the same as before, that some part of him is irretrievably lost.

Meanwhile an intensive survey of the ice condition on Lake Ladoga was under way. The ice was tested every day. At last, on November 17, the ice was solid enough to walk on. Although not entirely, the lake was crusted over. It was wonderful that it had happened so early. The scouts walked out cautiously across the first thin ice—it was still giving underfoot. They wore lifebelts and carried poles. They reached Kobona without mishap. The next morning, November 18, they once again stepped onto the ice, marking the trail to "mainland" Russia. Navigation had stopped and, as if that weren't enough, it was not flying weather, so that planes could not deliver even the small quantities of food the air force had previously brought to the city. The scouts and road-builders continued the preparation of the ice route on the 19th—it had to be cleared of snow, levelled, and any cracks filled in. Here they were happy about the frost that the Leningraders were cursing, they wanted it to get still colder, to speed up the formation of ice. By the 20th it was 18 centimetres thick in places, and more than 300 horse-drawn sledges made their way down onto the lake and set off towards "the mainland" for supplies of flour.

"24th November. How endlessly time drags on! How monotonous it is. All my thoughts are occupied with food and the desire to escape the throes of hunger, cold and fear... All hopes of evacuation in the near and not-so-near future have been put aside. Along the fronts and outside Leningrad the Germans have the initiative again. I should think they have

advanced still nearer as their shells are now exploding in our street, right outside our house.

"This morning I stood in queues from half-past six. These endless lines of hungry people ... are imprinted on my memory forever! Didn't get anything, none of the shops had any butter, cereal or meat. Not one. Yet I spent a whole four hours standing in line... And I have to queue up again.

"Mother says that, firstly, the Northern railway line has already been cleared (according to Turanosova) and is now being rebuilt (it had been dismantled). And, secondly, all signs indicate that evacuation of government institutions, etc. from Leningrad is now under way.

"Mother keeps mumbling something incomprehensible about our evacuation but, by all accounts, it's doubtful anything will come of that.

"25th November. Went to an eye specialist. He prescribed glasses, saying that I am completely blind in one eye and have 30 per cent vision in the other. I think I'll have to go to a pay hospital.

"Some units on the Southern Front have gone onto the offensive. They have pushed the Germans back 60 km, and have smashed (...) an infantry corps...

"Near Ufa a loaf of bread costs 2 roubles 50 kopeks. What's more, you can get as much as you want and without ration cards, but that's considered expensive there. Imagine that, eh?! It's paradise...

"26th November. Since this morning the city's been under fierce artillery fire, especially in the vicinity of Sennaya Square and our neighbourhood. Two more shells hit house No. 30. There are many wounded and dead.

"Stakelberg's mother called me a complete fool today for not stealing anything from Anfisa Nikolayevna. I wouldn't even stop to think twice about it, she said.

"Instead of vegetable oil they're giving jam. Queues everywhere. Oh, if only I could get hold of some coconut oil! From somewhere, anywhere...

"Mother has applied to be given a seat on a plane leaving Leningrad. Chances are nothing will come of it, and although I harbour some secret hope of escape, a variety of unpleasant thoughts oppress me.

"Mother's asked me to give her Ira's bread ration card. They want to deprive me of biscuits. Ah, well... Once Ira gets her hands on those biscuits she'll never let them out of her clutches, and that'll be the last I see of them... It'll be back to those loathsome, humiliating scenes of sharing out. Even if I do get a biscuit tomorrow, it won't help any. As from the day after tomorrow, that'll be the end of my already all too unattractive existence. What sort of a life is it when they're robbing me of my last joy—biscuits... Yet I'm still expected to go to the shops now, get potato flour and coconut oil or jam, while all they do is complain every day about how tired they are and so on. Ira's sure to grasp the biscuits with both hands.

"(...) the situation is exactly as before. The offensive on Moscow is continuing. Tula has fallen... Fierce battles are under way in the area around Tikhvin. Rumours abound in the city that the instant the army breaks through, it will be evacuated from Leningrad and transferred out-

side Moscow, while Leningrad will be surrendered and its inhabitants will be able to retreat with the army on foot. (...) frame of mind! Such thoughts!"

Rumours such as those cast a shadow on the already gloomy life of those caught in the blockade.

Meanwhile the army and the Baltic Fleet were doing everything possible to equip and provide communications, transport and repair back-up for the ice route across Ladoga. Special units were brought up to the lake—anti-aircraft artillery, fighter planes, road-building regiments, bridge-laying battalions, and medical units. On November 22, 1941, the ice route was tested. Later it was to be named the Road of Life. In the first few weeks its activity was barely perceptible. Only a succession of sledges cautiously made their way across the flimsy ice. Later came the first lorries, but they would quickly go out of action. And it was also extremely difficult to deliver the loads to the lake—on November 8 the Germans occupied Tikhvin, thus cutting the last remaining railway line through Vologda, Cherepovets, Tikhvin and Volkhov. Only in December, after the troops of the Volkhov Front had recaptured Tikhvin, was it possible to restore the railway line and extend it right to the eastern bank of Lake Ladoga. Now loads could be brought directly to the ice road.

Up till that time, in September and October 1941, the tiny Ladoga fleet (a few tugs, launches and barges) was trying, with Herculean efforts, to solve the impossible task of delivering supplies of foodstuffs, shells, ammunition, fuel and lubricating oils to Leningrad, as well as evacuating people. The autumn brought stormy weather, which often hampered shipments, and towards October 20 the waves rose so high as to put a stop to all navigation. Until November 20, 1941, only individual vessels got through to Leningrad. Deliveries of foodstuffs by air were also interrupted—by order of the Chairman of the State Defence Committee all aircraft were utilised for military purposes—the battle for Moscow was in progress. A.I. Mikoyan writes about that in his memoirs, published in the *Journal of Military History*. He describes the organisation of food supplies to Leningrad from areas deep in the rear of the country and speaks of how foodstuffs were delivered to the Road of Life. Mikoyan pinpoints one of the reasons for Leningrad's grave food situation:

"At the very beginning of the war, at the time the German fascist forces were unfolding their offensive, many trains carrying foodstuffs, travelling westward in accordance with the mobilisation plan laid down prior to the war, were unable to reach their destinations—because some of the addresses were now in occupied territory and others were threatened with the same fate. I gave instructions for diverting these trains to Leningrad in the knowledge that large warehouses existed there.

"Assuming that Leningraders would be only too happy with this decision, I did not consult them in advance. Even Stalin only learnt of it after a telephone call from Zhdanov in Leningrad. Zhdanov informed

him that all the Leningrad warehouses were packed to the limit and insisted that no foodstuffs over and above designated supplies be dispatched to them.

"After telling me of this conversation Stalin asked why I was sending so much food to Leningrad.

"I explained why, adding that, in a situation of war, stockpiles of foodstuffs generally, and flour particularly, would never be superfluous in Leningrad. All the more so, since the city had always been supplied with wheat brought from miles away (chiefly from the Volga areas), and such deliveries could easily become difficult. As regards storage—in a large city like Leningrad facilities could always be found... At that time none of us envisaged Leningrad under siege. Consequently, Stalin instructed me not to despatch provisions in excess of agreed quantities to Leningrad without the prior consent of the city authorities."*

More from Yura Ryabinkin's diary.

"28th November. Went to the T.B. clinic. Was sent for an X-ray and for tests. What comes next—I've no idea.

"Today I'll go down on my knees, begging Mother to let me keep Ira's bread ration card. I'll roll on the floor if necessary, but if she refuses even after that... Then I'll have nothing more to keep me going. The daytime air raid today is again continuing for close on three hours. All the shops are closed, so where am I supposed to get potatoes, flour and jam from? Right after the all clear goes I'll have a scout around. As for evacuation, I've lost all hope. It's all empty talk... I'll stop going to school—just now my brain's not geared to studying. How can it be? At home—hunger, cold, scolding, crying, and well-fed I. next door. Each day is so incredibly like the previous one in its monotony, the thoughts it brings, the hunger, the bombing, the shelling. The electricity's cut off now, I can hear the drone of a plane and the barking of ack-ack guns somewhere, and just now the house shuddered from the blast of a bomb exploding nearby... The weather's dull and grey, muddy white clouds hang low, it's snowing in the yard outside, and my mind is filled with equally dismal grey thoughts. I think of food, of warmth, of comfort... There's not a single slice of bread in the house (we now get 125 g per person a day), not even a bread crumb, nothing that's edible at all. And it's cold, my hands are freezing, my feet are like ice...

"Tonight Mother will come home and take Ira's bread ration card from me—all right then, I'll sacrifice it to Ira, so that at least she'll survive all this hellish (...), and I'll manage somehow... If only I could get away somehow... Get away... How selfish I am! I've become hardened, I've... What has become of me! Am I anything at all like the person I was three months ago? The day before yesterday I sneaked a spoonful or so from Anfisa Nikolayevna's saucepan. When no one was looking I took some butter and cabbage from the food supplies hidden away to last us the next ten days. I greedily watched Mother dividing up part of a sweet (...)

* *Voenno-istoricheskyy zhurnal* (Journal of Military History), No. 2, 1977, pp. 45-46.

and Ira. I start arguments over every piece, every crumb of food... What have I become? I feel that to become once more as I used to be I must have the hope, the certain knowledge that tomorrow or the day after I will be evacuated with the rest of the family, but that is not to be. There will be no evacuation and yet still, deep down inside, I cling to a secret hope. If it weren't for that hope I'd start thieving, robbing, I don't know how far I'd go. I know only one thing I wouldn't stoop to—and that's betrayal. I'm certain of that. But as for all the rest... Can't write any more—my hand's stiff with cold."

IRA'S RATION CARD

To read Yura's diary without a break is heavy going. It leaves you feeling stifled. The world he describes is too confined, and Yura is aware of it himself. The blockade had not only cut the city off from the rest of the country, it had isolated families too, severing people's ordinary everyday links—with their work, their friends, the outside world. You can see how Yura gradually ceased to be aware of the general course of the war, how he stopped perceiving the ferocity of the struggle, which meanwhile was intensifying and helping people forget their sufferings and privations. As you become more deeply immersed in Yura's diary, you occasionally find yourself, together with Yura, losing all awareness of that spirit of self-sacrifice and hatred which at the time was prevalent among the people. It is useless to search the diary for any reference to that profound turning point which occurred on all fronts following the crushing defeat of the Germans outside Moscow in December 1941.

During those winter months of 1941-42 one of us was fighting on the Leningrad Front and can recollect the immense effect on morale from that first of our victories.

We were stationed outside Pushkin. Our independent artillery machine-gun battalion occupied a sector beyond the railway line, on bare, snow-covered lowlands. The sector was too large for the battalion. Reinforcements were few and far between. At times the platoons consisted of only five to seven people. We were short of men for sentry duty, and were unable to relieve the battle outposts. Yet every day the communication lines had to be cleared of snow. Likewise trenches. And the field of fire had to be cleared also. Firewood had to be found, had to be carted to the dug-outs, the stoves had to be kept going. We also had to see to it that our weapons were always clean, because on top of all, we were keeping up fire, doing sentry duty, dragging the wounded to safety beyond the railway embankment... As if that weren't enough, at dawn we would crawl across into no-man's land to dig cabbages out from under the snow, because we were hungry. Every day someone would be sent off to hospital—suffering from frostbite or edema.

It's impossible now to comprehend how we were able to fend off enemy attacks, go out on reconnaissance, and even make attempts to



regain a height. Actually, we too lived in an extremely confined space—the platoon dug-out, the battle outpost, to our left an immobilised, charred lorry blanketed in snow—goodness knows how it came to be in the middle of the field. To our right, in the distance, was Pulkovo Hill, and closer to us a line of bushes. But in front of us, directly ahead, was the Pushkin Station, and visible through field glasses—the palace. All that I've mentioned was our landscape, our front, our field of battle. We had scant knowledge of what was happening on the adjoining sectors. But in our immediate proximity were the German troops. It was them we were studying, they were the ones we knew and could see: in places our trenches came so close together that we could hear them talking, hear the clinking of their thermos flasks. When one of our snipers succeeded in shooting one of the Germans, we also heard their shouting and swearing.

In front were the Germans, and behind us we could see Leningrad. Through the clear air the city's outline was distinct, down to the last spire, cupola and chimney, as though carved by some old master craftsman on the edge of the earth, between its white expanse and the blue sky. At night the crimson glow of fires would engulf part of the city. During the daytime shells would swoosh softly over our heads. The sky would be clear, but we would hear their invisible flight, and then the dull thud of explosions would reach our ears after a brief delay. The Germans shelled the city according to a set timetable and also on the dot the bombers headed towards the city every day. Their return route lay directly over our heads. At one time we used to discharge our rifles at them in helpless fury, fire armour-piercing shells at them or anti-tank guns, on the off-chance of hitting some vulnerable spot. But that was some time back. By now we had grown wiser, and saved our ammunition for better use. We would simply wait for the ack-ack guns to start barking and observe the bombing. Black columns of smoke would slowly rise, distorting the city's clear outline. We would try to guess which of the city's districts were being bombed.

There was nothing we could do, except to avoid looking back, at Leningrad. And we were anything but eager to go to the city. But then permission to go wasn't exactly readily obtainable, anyway. I, for instance, went there only once that winter, which was more than enough for me. But that notwithstanding, we were constantly aware of the city's presence behind us, of its uneven, barely audible breathing.

Things were not like this on any other front.

From the day we learnt of the rout of the Germans outside Moscow, everything changed for us. True, we still fought badly here, on the Leningrad Front. In December-January the offensive was going disastrously, hardly anything resulted from all our efforts, and it appeared we were still unable to conduct offensive battles. But for some inexplicable reason we were now quite firmly convinced that the Germans would never take Leningrad. Not because they hadn't the strength, but because we would not let them. This strange and, what seemed, unsubstantiated conviction came upon us during those December days, days of our weakness, starvation and shortage of men. Maybe it was somehow tied in with the fact that around the 20th of December a delegation of women workers

from Leningrad came to our unit, to the frontline, in order to give us presents. Perhaps the officers in charge had felt the Leningraders might benefit from our fighting spirit, or equally plausible, they had wanted to encourage us. It could have been either way. The delegation reached our company in the guise of three women. All three were swaddled in shawls and woollen scarves, and wore belts and bits of cord for warmth. When they took off their coats and warm things inside the dug-out, we saw they were young girls, all three of them thin, you might even say bony, to judge by their protruding shoulder blades and cheekbones. The dug-out was well heated for their arrival and as we entered it they handed us socks, tobacco pouches and mittens. Their dresses were too voluminous for them and hung loosely about their skinny shoulders, but nonetheless we found all three of them very sweet. They appeared in our company in the evening, after it had grown dark. An hour later our sergeant-major brought us our porridge. A mess-tin of porridge with corned beef, plus a lump of sugar, a bit of bread and a rusk—was what our dinner consisted of, and our supper too, from which anyone who wanted to could leave enough for breakfast. That evening we shared our porridge with our guests, or to be more precise, gave them most of it, so that each one got almost two helpings to eat. After that Volodya played the guitar for them, and they told us how they made underwear at their factory, and then they settled down to sleep. They had in fact begun to nod off right after their meal. The journey had tired them, but the food and the warmth had been far more effective in knocking them out. They slept in our bunks. We had callers from the neighbouring units popping into our dug-out to satisfy their curiosity. It seemed years since we had seen women in dresses. Yet what were these women like—thin, exhausted, faded. As the soldiers crowded in the entrance to our dug-out looking at the sleeping girls, their feelings were certainly not those normally attributed to members of the opposite sex, but rather feelings of pity and compassion. Who knows, maybe it was this compassion that made them real men. Those three women represented Leningrad to us...

They were woken before morning so they could leave while it was still dark. They wanted to sleep on, assuring us that they hadn't had such a good night's sleep for months.

Our lieutenant and I saw them as far as the command post. We ventured forth, using the red-gold blaze of fires to guide us. A solitary search-light swept across the low sky. The lieutenant invited them to join him on the skating-rink in the Central Park the following winter. "You'll be able to identify me by these mittens of yours," he joked. I laughed with him, and it was then I suddenly realized that the Germans would not enter Leningrad, that now everything depended solely on when we could beat them.

Yura Ryabinkin had nothing to give him that same optimistic feeling. Therein lay the agony which overwhelmed many Leningraders that winter, in the midst of their devastated existence.

He begs that Ira's card be returned to him. He wants it in exchange for his card, so that instead of 150 grammes of glutinous bread he could get 100 grammes of dry stuff, called biscuits (which was sometimes given

out to children). Yura believes that these "biscuits" will be his salvation.

But with all this there is a clear record of his torment: it will be terrible to be deprived of the card, yet he understands that he has no right to it. All the same he does not want to relinquish it, is willing to go down on his knees—that with his pride!—to beg for the return of the card. Then, a few lines further on, he pulls himself together, appeals to his own conscience (he'll give it back, at least Ira will survive), and, having come to his senses, he suddenly sees himself objectively and is horrified ("What has become of me!"). He feels remorseful, ashamed of himself: he reveals that he could not restrain himself, and was taking things on the quiet which weren't his to take—spooning things out of a saucepan, stealing butter and cabbage. He confesses, recording all his misdeeds, minor ones, yet horrifying to him: he bitterly reproaches himself, is afraid of himself, fearful of losing sight of all moral standards—of becoming a thief, a robber. His inflamed conscience senses the inevitable abyss ahead, and the boy is tortured by sorrow and is in fear of not having the strength to control himself.

Nevertheless, the following day he asks for Ira's card. And very likely pleads and demands it, most certainly, under pain of humiliation, for the scene is a stormy one: it's not easy for a mother to choose between her two children. He gets his card, but there are only two-coupons' worth of bread left because it is the end of the month, and two days later a new ration card is due, for December, and the renewed agony of whether he'd get the new one or not.

All this can be read between the lines of the diary, and maybe there is no need for a commentary, no need to prompt the reader, but this is one of the passages which we cannot in all conscience pass over without saying anything.

"29th November. Two items of news from yesterday. The first—a letter from Tina, written by her en route to Siberia, from the town of Bui, where during the Civil War my grandfather died of typhus. She writes that she is getting along fairly well (which means she's fine), and that she's going far, far away. The letter was written at the end of October. The second news is that Mother has decided, come what may, to get away from Leningrad. Even on foot. But so far it's only a verbal decision. I have to start going to school again, for only students get permission to be evacuated from Leningrad. And besides that, I'll have to pay 100 roubles for my studies.

"Personally, I consider the situation in Leningrad to be extremely grave. The absence of food, the unceasing artillery bombardment of all the city's districts, plus all manner of other ordeals... But, on the whole, I feel the state of things as regards evacuation is beginning to become more or less clear, although this clarification will take another month or so.

"I keep weighing up and considering what I should take with me. I've decided to definitely take along, insofar as it's possible, a satchel with some of my 'junk'—two books on chess, some English literature, *The*

History of Diplomacy, a few history maps, the best postcards from my collection, two or three textbooks for the ninth year (e.g. *The Fundamentals of Darwinism*, the *Literature, History, Geography* textbooks, maybe without the last one).

"How good it is to forget oneself in such sweet daydreams as evacuation, but hunger brings you back to reality.

"I am struck by the change in Anfisa Nikolayevna's behaviour. Now yesterday, for example, she gave us a plate of wheat porridge and a saucer of rusks, and wanted nothing in return. And she's been bringing us cocoa from the building trust canteen, only now it's disappeared. Today I got her some jam and she let me have 50 grammes of it. All in all, she is of great help to us now. Who knows, another six months living together and we may even have become friends with her. But then, you can never be sure. I know one thing for a fact: in a few days' time she will have left Leningrad. It's late now. Evening. We had a meal of jelly, made with potato flour and some of the jam I got today, and some rusks—those Anfisa Nikolayevna gave us—also with jam.

"Tomorrow Ira will be getting 250 grammes of biscuits on her card. What a lot! Never mind, let her eat them. Let her...

"Today mother said that she'd handed in the application requesting permission for us to leave Leningrad by plane. Don't know if anything will come of it. I hope for the best...

"There was a violent scene in Anfisa Nikolayevna's room. I. was telling his wife off for bartering bread for vodka and such-like for herself.

"And so it is November 29 today. I wrote very little in the evening. I feel terribly sleepy and I don't want to go out into the cold hall. And I am so hungry... Another week like this—and that'll be it.

"30th November. Mother is obviously inspired by the prospect of evacuation. Yesterday she spent a long time discussing evacuation with Anfisa Nikolayevna who gave her, or rather promised to give her, the address of her parents who live near Zlatoust. Although it's not a wheat-growing area the starvation can't possibly be as bad as it is here. But now everything hangs on the decision that will be made regarding mother's application. That much is clear. We should know the outcome in a week at the latest.

"Every day Anfisa Nikolayevna gives us eight rusks, today she also gave us a piece of horsemeat and a bottle of vegetable oil. Thanks to her for that.

"Precisely at noon the Germans began another air raid. And yet again they're simultaneously bombing us and barraging the city with artillery fire from their batteries.

"I have started to put some money aside. At present I have 30 roubles, but mother knows only about 10 of them.

"Thus, only a few days remain before our fate is decided. If we can't leave by air, we'll go on foot. We'll have to walk close on a hundred kilometres, but we'll do it somehow.

"Mum's dream is to break away from noisy city life, to settle in some large village with a 10-year school for me, to get us a small plot of land to cultivate, find a cottage, and in due time, give me an agricultural educa-

tion. Then she could spend the rest of her life in peace and comfort, like Tina. Mum is weary of her life. She is attracted by the kind of life Tina led in Shlisselburg—a calm, peaceful life devoid of any complications and excess of emotion... But maybe I'm mistaken and this is only a temporary desire on her part. Although, come to think of it, she had similar dreams in Sestroretsk, and at Vsevolozhskaya. A life amidst nature, such a life is demanding... But never mind, that's the last thing to worry about now. Outside the ack-ack guns are firing, bombs are exploding, thoughts of such things are beyond me at present.

"By the way, today Mum told me that the hunger we're experiencing now is worse than the hunger of 1918... In 1918, according to Mum, so-called 'sack-trading' was most widespread. People would travel to distant villages, get bread, flour and butter, and then return to Petrograd to sell these goods straight from their sacks, at fabulous prices, of course. Then someone with money could keep himself comfortably fed, while today a person can have millions but if he's lost his food and bread coupons for the month, he will inevitably die of starvation, unless he's some remarkably enterprising person.

"It's better at the fronts... The German troops are retreating in disorder to Taganrog. We are pursuing them.

"And so the rout of Nazi Germany is beginning. Outside Moscow, outside Rostov, outside Leningrad. The sooner this fascist pig goes up in smoke the better, to hell with it! But when it does there'll be such poisonous fumes rising that nothing and nobody will survive.

"I have to go to school tomorrow. It's a must. If things ever get as far as evacuation, then I'll only be allowed to leave the city if I'm a student. That's why going to school is a necessity.

"How I'd love to eat some bread now... Bread... Bread...

"1st December. The new month has arrived, the start of another 10-day ration period. I'm writing in the morning. I was at the school today by 8 o'clock. But I was told that as from today lessons are to begin at 10 o'clock, and the school doors will be opened at twenty to ten. I set off for home. I dropped in at the trust canteen. There was hot tea with a chocolate sweet. For the sweet they cut off a ten-gramme coupon from my confectionary ration card. I went home. At 9.30 I wanted to leave for school, but the air raid siren went. Now as I'm writing, the raid is continuing, and it must already be after 10.

"I'm so anxious to conserve my energy now that even the decision to walk down the corridor to the dining room seems a major one to me. From top to bottom my body feels weak. My feet heavy, my knees shaky, I find it hard to raise myself from a chair, my entire body's so weak. And I most probably won't get anything to eat until 6 or 7 o'clock tonight. Mother has hidden the butter, I had a search but couldn't find it, and I can't eat raw horsemeat. If the air raid goes on for another two hours or so, I won't go to school. What's the point? But then I really ought to go. I'll only take a few of the text-books with me.

"This means the Germans are going to start their air raids at 10 in the morning, or rather 9.30. But that's exactly the time I have to leave for school. What shall I do?



"I'd like, however, to sum up everything I've learnt over the month of November, and to make a note of the differences between November 30 and October 30. To begin with school started in November, destroying all my thirst for knowledge because of the circumstances in which we studied. And so it seemed I had done with school. Instead I went over to the daily ordeal of standing in queues. Instantly all my idealism was reduced to material considerations. The primary requirement of my life remained the same over the last month—food.

"It must be said that the food situation on 30th October was worse than that on 30th November. At the same time essential food requirements remain the same. 'Anything in the least degree edible goes straight into one's mouth.' That's a motto where we can soon add the prefix 'in-' to the word 'edible'. My hopes have remained the same, only now they have a firmer basis in reality. If on 30th October evacuation seemed remote to me, now it's a question of one week. On the whole, the past month, a month of suffering and tears, family quarrels and hunger has drained me of half my old energy. Not once have I had a satisfying meal over the last month. Not one day has passed without bombing and shelling, made all the more oppressive not only by hunger, but by fear for my own, my mother's and Ira's lives.

"Two positive occurrences took place during November. Relations with Anfisa Nikolayevna have changed. She is hoping to be evacuated within the next few days and is consequently giving us quite a lot of food, a lot, I mean, considering the current food situation. All of it free and asking nothing in return. The other good thing is Tina's evacuation with her evacuation post from Boksitogorsk to Siberia. Her last letter, the one we re-

cently received, said that she was going by train via the town of Bui, which is in the Yaroslavl region.

"All my hopes seem to be balanced precariously on the point of a knife, held in uncertain equilibrium. What will be the reply to Mum's application for evacuation by air? Just in case, we ought to prepare ourselves for evacuation on foot. Although there are rumours of such an evacuation, it is of a spontaneous and disorganised character at the present. There's no shortage of conjecture on the evacuation. Talk of some sort of feeding points along the way, of transporting the children on lorries, etc. There's no limit to what people will invent! One curious point. The day before yesterday a rumour sparked up in the queues that for the 11-day children's ration card you would get 250 g of biscuits. Yesterday, for as long as I stood in the queue at the baker's, dozens of people showered the shop assistants with questions such as, 'Are you giving biscuits in exchange for the No. 11 coupon?' and, as was to be expected, they received a negative answer."

As from September, when the supply of foodstuffs to the city decreased, substances other than flour had to be added in the process of bread-baking. For instance, oat flour, ground barley, bran, oil-cake. But even these were running out. The scientists were searching for other substitutes, which could be added to flour to increase the surplus weight of the bread. That is, the excess in weight of a loaf over the weight of the flour after baking. Under the supervision of V.I. Sharkov, a professor at the Forestry Academy, the scientists suggested using cellulose, the very same that serves as raw material in paper manufacture. They designed a plant for making that cellulose edible. From the end of November it was added to bread as a filler.

"We would first get a greyish substance, which, after being passed through filters and compressed would come out as a sheet of some stuff with a 40 per cent moisture content. The bread-baking plants would take this stuff, mix it into the flour and thus bake bread," Dmitri Sorokin, the plant's production manager, told us. "Those of us on the plant's managerial side received exactly the same provision as the shop floor workers at that time. I got a single worker's bread ration card, nothing more. On one occasion, when a horse was killed at the mortar battery, the soldiers with whom we closely associated sent us a piece of it, and our supplies manager made it last a week and a half, giving us a bowl of soup in the evenings. She gave it to four of us—the plant director, Professor Sharkov, chief engineer Melnikov, and myself. That was the only time we had an addition to our menu."

The bread turned out sodden and clay-like, with a bitter grassy taste, but how it cheered the bakers, the above-mentioned Vasily Sharkov and his colleagues. They were well aware of the pains, the mental effort it had

taken to produce that bread. Say what you like, it was bread after all! December, January bread—Leningrad's sorrow and Leningrad's joy...

SAVING THE CHILDREN

Life was more difficult for Lydia Okhapkina in those days than for Knyazev, more difficult even than for Yura Ryabinkin. It was not on her own account that she kept up the struggle. Two small helpless children, her son and daughter, needed to be protected from hunger and cold. But by what means? How? What could she possibly have done in December, in January, by which time nothing remained in the house, not a scrap of anything. Every single edible thing had been tracked down and collected, every crevice scrutinised, scraped, everything gnawed or chewed. But can anyone foretell, foresee what a mother might be capable of? Examples of a mother's love and selflessness were subjects for many Biblical stories, folk tales and legends. It would be difficult to amaze anyone on that score. Especially as the subject of our story, Lydia Okhapkina, was not in any way outstanding and was chosen by us primarily because she had kept a true and honest written record of things—that being the sole reason to single her out from other women, who with no less emotion and effort fought for their children's lives. Lydia Okhapkina's notes give us a glimpse of the sacred world of mother's love and self-sacrifice. This love spurred her on in the desperate search for a way to save her children.

"Rats would run about the flat squeaking hungrily. They gnawed at the wall-paper, which had once been stuck on with flour paste. I had no furniture to speak of in the room. Only two narrow iron beds, on one of which Tolya slept, and on the other my daughter and I. Plus a kitchen table which the mistress of the flat let me bring in from the kitchen. All our furniture had been left behind in the village of Volkovo. A 17-year old girl Rosa and her aunt lived in the flat. The husband of that elderly woman was a professor, and he had been evacuated with his institute, but she hadn't gone for fear of leaving her property. Their room was richly furnished. They had carpets, a piano, and good furniture. Later, in January 1942, she died of hunger. Countless times she had come to me complaining that Rosa hardly gave her any bread. Since she was afraid of going outside herself, it was Rosa who brought the bread. I was sorry for her, but what could I have done? I had enough troubles of my own. It had been a long time since I last heard from my husband and I had no idea where he was, how he was. But then he didn't even know our address on Vasilievsky Island. I was sure we would never see one another again. But I thought about it without any great heartache—we'd all probably die of starvation soon, anyway.

"I hoped we would die together, myself and the children, because I was afraid that if, for instance, I chanced to be killed when out of the





house, the children would be crying desperately, calling 'Mummy, mummy', and would later die of starvation in the cold room. Little Nina cried continuously, wailing for hours on end, unable to go to sleep. This crying, which was more like groaning, would drive me crazy. Then, to make her sleep, I would let her suck my blood. My breast milk had long since dried up, and I had no breasts to speak of by then anyway—barely anything left. So I would make a prick in my arm just above the elbow and put my daughter's mouth to it. She would suck quietly and fall asleep. But I would have great difficulty going to sleep, I'd start counting numbers, then lose count. I'd remember reading *War and Peace*, where Pierre Bezukhov had also counted to a thousand to fall asleep. But I would lose count, I'd keep thinking of where to get food, no matter what kind. I'd picture loaves of bread, or see myself gathering potatoes in a field. I'd pick a whole sackful and be unable to carry it away. Once on the black market I managed to buy some carpenter's glue. People used it to make jelly. And so I did the same and ate it. And I'd give Tolya some. I was afraid of giving any to little Nina. But the glue gave us constipation, so I stopped using it. Another time I managed to get a piece of pig's hide. That tasted a bit better, but it needed a lot of cooking time to make it soft, and I was sparing with the paraffin because I hadn't much left.

"It was terribly cold in the flat, there was hoar frost on the walls, such as you can sometimes see on the inside of a shed in winter. When I had to change Nina, to prevent her catching cold I would slip my hands into the quilt she was wrapped in, push the dry nappy under her, and throw the other one on the floor, where it soon froze like damp sheets hanging out in cold air freeze. I didn't have a thermometer, but the temperature inside was certainly below zero. I had grown so thin that there was no flesh on my legs at all. My breasts were like a man's, nothing but nipples. The skin stretched tightly across my cheek-bones, my eyes were sunken. The children were also very skinny, and my heart would miss a beat when I looked at their thin arms and legs and their little transparent faces with enormous eyes. We hadn't a scrap of firewood. There was nothing for heating the water or cooking anything. Rosa told me there was some coal in the cellar, but said it was frightening to go down there for they used the place to dump corpses. I said, never mind, we'll still have to go. We took two buckets and set off. There really were a few corpses lying down there. We did our best not to look at them. We just scooped up the coal with our hands as quickly as we could, and made a speedy getaway. There was no electricity and we used wick-lamps. I had improvised one from a vial with a cotton wool wick fuelled by machine oil, which I'd got by barter. It gave out little light, so the room remained dark. Large shadows formed on the walls and a fine thread of smoke rose upwards. There wasn't any water either, and we had to fetch it from the Neva. I used to take a children's sledge with a bucket and a saucepan to the river. I needed a lot of water, because apart from drinking water and water used in cooking I had to have it to wash nappies...

"I became utterly indifferent to air alarms. They were infrequent; far more often their artillery would shell the streets. During one such bombardment I went out for bread because the queues were shorter while

these lasted, and I got caught in heavy fire. There was a house not far away and I wanted to hide there, but first I had to pass by a long fence. The shells flew around me and exploded very close. Someone shouted from the other side of the street: 'You idiot! Get down quickly, get down!' I dropped to the ground and clung to the wall. Then I looked around, got up and went down again, face downwards in the snow. I lay there a few seconds, my heart racing. I began to crawl. In fact, I moved along like a soldier at the front.

"The winter of 1941-42 was extremely cold. The temperature dropped to minus 30° and minus 40°C. All the while I kept thinking of where to get firewood. When I left Volkovo village, I had stuffed the wardrobe full of chopped firewood and hidden my gramophone under it. I wanted to go and get it, but there was no transport (i.e., trams) at that time, and it meant walking there and back—no mean distance. I kept putting it off, but got round to it eventually. Early in the morning I fed the children, locked them in and set off. Can you imagine my journey from Vasilievsky Island to Volkovo village? I crossed the Neva by a tramped-out path, came out onto Liteiny Prospekt and stood there staring at the familiar houses, which looked pretty bleak. Many had broken windows, dark holes reminiscent of eye-sockets. Others were missing a corner or a more substantial part of their structure. People would be living in the part still standing. I passed a number of pedestrians. They all walked very slowly, barely able to move their legs. All were well wrapped up, with thin grey faces, some men had also tied scarves over their warm hats.

"Yes, the city had been injured like a man in battle. But still, it was alive, was living a difficult life and refusing to die—people had hope, and did not lose their determination. A time had to come sooner or later when this nightmare, this horror, would end. When I got as far as Nevsky Prospekt, a wave of apprehension swept over me. It was almost deserted and lay submerged under a thick blanket of snow. Many houses were half-ruins. Most windows were boarded up. Trams and trolley-buses stood here and there, also covered with snow. The Gostiny Dvor department store was charred and black. There were no horses on Anichkov Bridge.

"On the corner of Ligovka and Razyezhaya streets there used to be a five-storey building. It was on fire now, and a strange kind of fire it was. The window frames and floors on each storey were burning, the flames cautiously venturing outside the windows, as if unhurriedly caressing the frames and sills. There was no wind, and the blue flames crawled slowly round the building. People said that the *burzhuikas* had caused the fire, and that the house had been burning for nearly three days already. Odd bits of furniture, beds, broken cupboards, trunks etc. had been piled up just outside the house. Nobody took any of that junk away now and nobody bothered to keep an eye on it either.

"When I at last arrived at my old home, I saw that the top floor of the house had been destroyed almost completely. The roof had been burnt while I was still living there. Several families went on living on the ground floor—I used to live on that floor too. My neighbours were Maria Nikolayevna and her grown-up daughter. They were both very thin but nevertheless looked better than people living in the centre of town. I

asked, 'How are you getting along? You haven't left then?' And she said, 'Where would we go? It's better here now, anyway. I've just dug up some potatoes across the railway line. And there's no shortage of firewood. The half-burnt wooden houses around provide us with enough planks and logs to keep the stove going and to do our cooking. The bombings have almost stopped.' I said, 'And I haven't a scrap of firewood.' 'Why don't you come back here, then?' she asked. And I replied, 'What could we come on? There's no transport, I came on foot.' And remembering that fact I said goodbye and went into my room. The windows—there were two—had been boarded up by someone. Snow was coming in through the cracks. It was everywhere—on the table, the bed, the sofa and the floor. It made my heart ache just to look at my old belongings, and painful memories of peacetime life overwhelmed me. But there was no time to be rueful, and I sprang into action. I took the gramophone, planning to exchange it for bread later, and picked a few toys up from the floor for Tolya. I recall taking the clock-work elephant and the teddy bear, and the celluloid parrot for my daughter—I packed them all and put them on the sledge together with some firewood. And I scraped the solidified trickle of fat from the side of the kitchen table, where we used to hang the frying-pan and the fat dripped down. I ate it right there, on the spot. I would remember that little bit of fat on numerous nights when I was very hungry and wanted to get some sleep. How I made the journey back I don't recollect. On the verge of total exhaustion, I got some bread off the coupons I had with me and consumed most of it as I walked back. I was past looking around me, I plodded on like a worn-out horse, the sole thought in my head being of the waiting children. I got home when it was quite dark.

"I wore my husband's felt boots all the time and two coats: my own and my husband's over it. Everybody wrapped up like that during this winter. Some people would drape ancient shawls and even quilts over their coats.

"Whenever I left the house my daughter would cry. To stop her I'd give her a small rye rusk and she would suck it for a long time. I'd given her one this time too. But even as I was locking the door, I heard her starting to cry. That was because Tolya had taken her rusk—I hadn't given him one as I had no more left. I went back and walloped him for the very first time. He wailed loudly and I felt very sorry for him, too. But still I told him that if he tried snatching the rusk from little Nina again, I'd throw him out into the street. He said, 'Don't, mummy, I won't do it any more.' I gave him a kiss, wrapped him up in a blanket and set off. That day we could draw rations—on my card I got 200 g of millet. I used to get the food we were entitled to for the childrens' ration cards through the childrens' canteen—and that helped us a lot. I'd get food for the two children there. Breakfast in the morning—very thin porridge and a tiny amount of it, too. And for the main meal—some sort of soup and something else to follow. Mashed potato or porridge again. If it hadn't been for the food we got at the canteen, we would have been even hungrier. My son would sit all the time gazing at the clock. I'd explained to him that when the large hand was on 12 and the little one on 10 we would have



breakfast, when the large was again on 12 and the small on 3—it would be dinnertime. And he would stare at the clock constantly. That millet I got I divided into approximately two portions, and used it to cook two evening meals of thin watery porridge. On one occasion, when I came back home after going out for bread, I found Tolya sitting on the floor and picking at something with a match. I asked him what he was doing. He replied that he was picking out millet grains from the gaps between the floorboards. I'd spilled some as it had been dark when I cooked it, and there he was picking out the grains and eating them together with the dirt.

"I thought, 'Goodness, how hungry he must be, but what can I do, what can I feed him with?' He was so skinny and weak that he rarely got up from the bed now, and kept telling me: 'Mummy! I could eat a whole bucketful of porridge and a whole sack of potatoes.' I tried to distract him. I tried telling him fairy tales, but he wouldn't listen properly and kept interrupting me with, 'You know, mummy, I could eat a loaf this large, as big as that.' And he would point to a round tub. I'd say, 'No, you couldn't, there wouldn't be enough room in you tummy.' He would object: 'Yes I could, mummy, I could. I wouldn't sleep then, I'd just eat, and eat, and eat.' He looked like a jackdaw, just a big mouth and two large brown eyes full of sadness. And such spindly legs, with the knee cap sticking out. His hair, uncut for months, was long and he looked dishevelled all the while. Once I got 200 grammes of dry peas on my ration card. I decided to make a watery soup out of it. I cooked it inside the stove and wrapped it in a blanket to let it stew a little and cook through properly. Then I went to our neighbour's. She was dying... I stayed for a short while before leaving. I came back and saw the lid was off the saucepan. So I said to Tolya: 'You've already been at it.' To which he said: 'Only one spoonful, mummy, I only tried one spoonful.' And I said: 'All right, let's eat then.' And I scooped the soup and fished out the bit of rag I'd used to bandage up his hands. His skin trouble had almost cleared, and the scabs were by then falling away. But I kept bandaging his hands to stop him infecting myself or baby Nina—and that was the bit of bandage he'd dropped in. He immediately started wailing: 'It wasn't my fault, mummy, it fell in by itself.' What could we do? I just couldn't make myself throw the soup away. So we ate it, just as it was... I remember that incident to this day, and Tolya remembered it for a very long time afterwards too."

The incident with that bit of rag shows a slice of straightforward down-to-earth reality, which is unpleasant to read about. Many times we felt like deleting it on paper, omitting it the way we omitted certain horrifying details, nightmarish incidents and events that were inconceivable and something you'd rather not know about. They induced only horror and melancholy. But that incident with the rag bandage, however nauseating its nature, nevertheless stuck in our minds. It seemed to indicate the measure of human suffering, not the measure of degeneration. These people broke no moral code. They overcame their squeamishness, set it

aside, and remembered this incident as a symbol (that's how far we'd come). They recalled the rag bandage without shame, without self-reproach. (We were so hungry, we weren't too fussy about that rag!) Human beings often retain within themselves, in their memories, such symbols of suffering, of anguish, of human endurance—something akin to that bandage. Does it help them or serve as a kind of reference point?

From the beginning of January 1942, the Moscow City Committee of the Party and the Moscow City Executive Committee were getting ready a column of buses and lorries for the ice road across the Ladoga. Experienced drivers and maintenance workers had to be found for them. Forty buses were allocated for the transportation of Leningraders out of the city and there were also 200 lorries. Alexei Kosygin, a representative of the State Committee for Defence, had made arrangements for all the lorries to set off laden with sweetened condensed milk, dried food, butter, sugar, and fats. He also took the precaution of providing these vehicles with spare parts, and sending squads of maintenance men with them. Moscow gave all it possibly could, but that was not enough. So Kosygin got in touch with both the Yaroslavl and the Gorky regional Party committees, asking them to send lorries, with drivers and maintenance workers, to Leningrad. The vehicles had to be brought to Lake Ladoga by rail, and that also needed to be discussed with the then People's Commissar for Railways.

"Lorries were arriving from Moscow, Yaroslavl, Gorky—we had to organise motor transport columns, maintenance services, to receive the foodstuffs, and to sort out the evacuation arrangements," we were told by A.S. Boldyrev. "Another 250 lorries were on the way, young healthy drivers kept arriving from the 'mainland', two for each lorry. The buses had been left in Zhikharevo, on the eastern side of the lake..."

All evacuation was restricted to a single route. Machinery, equipment and metals needed for the defence industry, and also people, all had to follow the same trail: first by rail from the Finland Station, then by vehicles across the Ladoga.

Factories evacuated to the east were in need of equipment and raw materials in short supply. Industrial plants standing dormant in Leningrad possessed vast potential in this respect. Every day Alexei Kosygin would receive reports of what was discovered at the paralysed Leningrad plants, about stocks of tungsten, molybdenum, nickel, chromium, and specialised machine-tools... An inventory of everything that could be removed without detriment to Leningrad's industry was in preparation.

What was to be transported from the city—people or equipment? The question was not raised, for both had to be done simultaneously, neither could be delayed for as much as an hour, neither had precedence over the other, or priority—yet the possibilities of the road were still so limited...

"We all went off to different Leningrad plants," A.S. Boldyrev recalls, "that had been designated for immediate evacuation, and also to those where the manufacture of defence products was still going on. A group of comrades, with officials from the city executive committee, went round the bus garages and motor depots to see where there were vehicles and drivers, and to work out how they could be used in the mass evacuation of the population.

"Together with Kosygin we went first to the Kirov Works, then on to the Electrosila plant, then to the Finland Station.

"We went up into the loft of one shop where an observation post had been set up. Using field glasses it was possible to get a good look at the German fortifications and the Germans themselves. All was quiet over there. Our troops were also silent. But you had to take care in moving about the factory grounds. The factory yard was a target for snipers. We called in at the hospital section. Workers suffering from dystrophy lay there. It was the only place where it was warm. The patients were given increased rations. When the conversation turned to evacuation, the elderly team-leader of the assembly shop said: 'You'd do better to evacuate the women and children. As you can see, we're at the frontline here. We want only one thing—to be put back on our feet as quickly as possible so that we can fight.' "

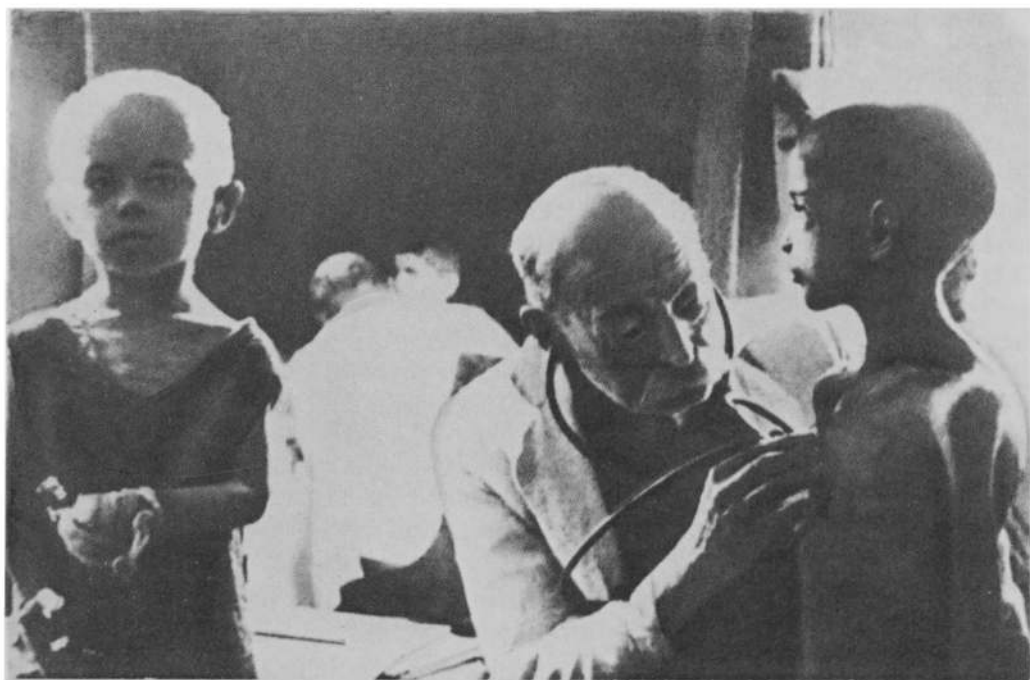
"From the reports of those who had visited various industrial enterprises the overall picture was pretty dismal—the motorised transport was not ready for the mass evacuation of people. The locomotives in the railroad transport were not in working condition. There was no coal, no water. The engine-drivers, as well as the other railway workers who were still alive, were sapped of all energy—many could not work."

On January 21, Alexei Kosygin gave an account of his views on mass evacuation to the Military Council of the Front. In the evening he telephoned Stalin in Moscow, informing him that the Military Council had accepted his proposal to evacuate half a million people within the next three months. The following day the State Committee for Defence took the decision on the evacuation of 500,000 people from Leningrad.

Here are more recollections by A.S. Boldyrev:

"A.G. Karpov and I began to see to the preparation of the first column of buses. We were supposed to travel with them across Ladoga. It was proposed to carry out a trial run with evacuees direct from Leningrad to Borisova Griva. It would be more convenient for the passengers, too—no change of transport, no re-loading. But we became convinced that mass transportation of people in accordance with that plan was not a viable proposition—the road was very rough, the buses worn out, the people not in any fit state to withstand the journey.

"The other option was the railroad. The Military Council consented to the distribution of increased rations to engine drivers and other crew members, to pointsmen and maintenance workers. The locomotives and carriages had to be repaired in double-quick time.



“Delivery of fuel to the Finland Station began without delay—coal and logs for the locomotives, and also for the stoves which were to heat the coaches. The locomotives had to be supplied with water, and that required organisation. The main water supply wasn’t working. It was decided to use water tanks, kept for fire fighting. They were to be filled from the Neva and brought back to the locomotives. The obtaining of necessary equipment and the organising and setting of things in motion had to be accomplished within days, not weeks, time was counted in hours. Everybody realised that a day’s delay would carry off the lives of thousands of Leningraders. The plans for bringing the evacuees to the station and their entrainment were drawn up literally overnight. The feeding arrangements and medical assistance for the journey were also worked out. The People’s Commissar for Railways promised to fly four teams of engine drivers, shunters and maintenance workers to Leningrad.”

A Council for evacuation was functioning in Moscow. That Council was assigned the task of billeting the evacuees in different towns, among them Vologda...

We wanted photographs to illustrate this book. So we went to look for pictures of plants and factories of blockade days in the TASS archives. We had a good idea what they looked like—shops smashed by shells, people so emaciated that they had to tie themselves to the machines in order not to fall. We went through thousands of photographs taken by reporters in those days. We saw people working the machines—men and women, some stern, some smiling, but all of them clearly cheerful. There

was no trace of hunger or suffering on their faces, nothing to tell you they were in the blockade. Fit for print just the way they were. And very few pictures showed the true state of things at plants and factories, told of how incredibly difficult it was to work.

At first we were outraged. What right had they to beautify, to falsify reality? But after talking to some reporters who had worked in those days we came to realise that this was not quite the case: they had in 1942-43 considered it their duty to the war effort to show that despite the blockade, the hunger, the cold and the shelling, people continued to work, to serve their country. With that task the press photographers had coped admirably. They were journalists, not artists. An artist's mind would have worked differently: he would have tried to provide history with invaluable documents of the life and heroism of Leningrad's citizens.

Lydia Okhapkina:

"Soon after I'd come back with the gramophone, I put a notice up at the bakery saying I had a gramophone to exchange for bread. The following day a soldier arrived and brought a whole loaf of bread. I asked for a bit more. He said: 'Gladly, but I'm afraid that's all I've got.' I also gave him the few records that I had. Shortly after that I put up another notice, meaning to sell my sewing machine, which I'd brought with me when we had been moved to Vasilievsky Island back in September. Not long after a woman came. She didn't offer me an entire loaf, but only just over a half. I hated to part with the sewing machine, but there was no option—I gave it to her. That woman didn't look particularly undernourished. I asked her where she worked. But she told me it wasn't my business. By then the price of bread was extremely high. You couldn't get any in exchange for clothing. Nobody had any need for it. I now had nothing else to barter.

"At the end of December 1941 I met a young woman while we were both standing in a queue for bread. She called me out of the queue and asked me to collect her bread rations, as I was nearer the front of the queue while she a long way behind. She also had three ration cards—two children's and one dependent's, the same as me. We were only allowed one measure of bread each, so it meant getting it all in one piece. I agreed. I got the bread and we split it in half. Then we got talking. She also lived on the 14th Line on Vasilievsky Island, her husband, too, was at the front. She said that she still had some firewood left (I hadn't any by that time) and suggested I move in with her. I agreed and moved the children and my meagre belongings that very same day. She was very impatient, and as soon as she got her bread she would eat it at once. While I would divide ours into three parts—for the morning, dinnertime and evening meals. We used to go to the canteen together, but take turns standing in the bakery queues. She'd go one day and I the next. One day towards evening I discovered my bread was missing. I used to put out a portion of bread into a small satchel and hang it up high above the sofa

on which all three of us slept. Tolya couldn't reach it there. The main reason I hung it up there was because anywhere else the rats could find it and get at it. So I asked her why she'd taken my bread? But she denied it.

"Soon after, one of her children—the girl—died. Towards the end of January, on the 27th, I still remember that date, Zhenya, that was the woman's name, went to the baker's, whilst I stayed with the children and was boiling water on the metal stove which we'd got in exchange for bread. About two hours later she returned to tell me that she'd lost my ration cards. I was so stunned that I felt the blood draining from my face, and I asked how we would now share the bread out. She said we wouldn't. Please forgive me, she said, but I've no intention of dying because of you. I did still have one children's card left, as we redeemed our bread in advance and I'd left just this one card for January 31. I said: 'Let me have at least one of your cards. It's hardly fair for the two of you to have three rations while three of us have to manage on one.' She refused. Then I told her I was leaving. She said: 'All right, go then!' So yet again I moved the children and my things back into my freezing room, narrow as a coffin. There was no one in the flat. After I'd moved to this woman's, Rosa had moved somewhere too. Our room was unbearably cold. Hoarfrost on the walls, snow on the windowsill. Goodness, I thought, how can we live in such cold, and for five days with barely any bread at all. I went into the room where the professor's wife had lived, took two chairs and broke them up to heat the stove. Then I ran down to the cellar and scraped up a bit of coal. I rushed round to the canteen to collect dinner. At night I couldn't sleep. Oppressive thoughts of death kept pursuing me. I was almost driven crazy by grief and the thoughts going through my head. Five days without bread. When there's far from enough of it anyway. I got out of bed and throwing myself down on my knees started to pray, praying and crying at the same time. I hadn't any icons, and I didn't know any prayers, anyhow. My children hadn't been christened, and I didn't believe in God myself. True, I would repeat to myself: 'Save us, God, don't let us die during an air raid.' But this time I had a different appeal to God, different words to say. I fervently whispered: 'God, you can see how I'm suffering, how hungry my little children and I are. I can't go on any more. God, I'm asking you for death, but only for us all to die together. I can't live any more. You can see how I'm suffering. Have mercy, God, on these innocent children'—and suchlike phrases.

"...The next day I heard someone banging on the front door. I hadn't gone for bread and so was still at home. I rushed to ask who it was. A male voice inquired if Lydia Okhapkina lived here. I let him in. He had come from the front, from my husband. He handed me a small package and a letter. Vasya wrote 'Dearest Lida...' Having read just those two words, I burst into tears and said: if he could only see what had become of his Lida! He went on to write that he was sending us a kilogram of semolina, a kilogram of rice and two packets of biscuits. For some reason I was reading it aloud. After the word 'rice' Tolya wailed plaintively: 'Mummy, make some porridge, only make it thick.' Those were his exact



words. The soldier, he was a lieutenant, suddenly began blowing his nose noisily and wiping away the tears which he could not hold back at the sight of us. He said: 'It's awful when children are so hungry. We'll get you out, wait just a little longer. I'll tell your husband all about you. And they, the fascists, will pay for all this. For all your tears, for your starvation, for everything.'

"Just that one time I made a thick porridge, as Tolya asked, and then went back to economising. But however hard I tried, it didn't take long to eat it all. And on top of that we had no firewood and were simply freezing. I wore a coat and felt boots in the flat. The children were also dressed in winter coats and wrapped in quilts.

"Once Rosa appeared and said that they were giving out coupons for firewood at the district executive committee. And priority was given to people with children. I went immediately and was given a coupon for one cubic metre of wood. The following day we borrowed the yardkeeper's sledge, and off we went, Rosa and I. We had to collect the wood from somewhere beyond the Smolensk Cemetery.

"With great effort, one log at a time, we hauled the wood up into the kitchen. Each log was a metre long. We got the stove going immediately. We put the wood in from the corridor, and the stove had outlets into both our room and Rosa's. Rosa also gave me a few books from the professor's collection for kindling. For the first time in a long while the place was really warm. I was very tired and wanted to sleep. I closed the flue a little earlier and opened the air-vent in our room. We were all badly poisoned by the fumes. I was wakened by my daughter's crying. I had a splitting headache. I got up, staggered and fell down. But in falling I somehow

managed to open the door. Cold air drifted in from the corridor. I don't remember how long I lay unconscious. Then I was somehow jolted back to consciousness. The children, how were they? Staggering, I grabbed my daughter, she was quiet and was barely breathing. I took her to the kitchen, then got Tolya and used my remaining energy to carry him out of the room. Then I sat down beside them myself. We all nearly died of asphyxiation. Tolya remained unconscious for quite a while. We began to starve yet again, time was getting on towards the end of February 1942. The food package had long since been eaten. Tolya suggested more than once: 'Mummy,' he'd say, 'let's make a lot of fumes again and die. Our head will hurt a little first, but then we'll go to sleep.' To hear this from a child was unbearable. Countless times already he had suggested to me that he either be killed, or asphyxiated."

Lydia Okhapkina continued to fight for the lives of her children. It never once entered her head that she had the right to choose which of her children to save and which to sacrifice, yet cases of that nature did occur. She rejected any such possibility, though she did realise that she might die herself and then both her children would die, that it was impossible for her to keep both of them alive, to fight for the two of them. She was aware of it all and continued the struggle. A mother's feelings were stronger than logic.

E.S. Lyapin, doctor of physics and mathematics, told us of people losing their ration cards and dying in full view of those around them. And logically speaking, the behaviour of those around was explicable,



justifiable, for they were all on the brink of death themselves. But there was a similar incident involving lost ration cards at the Radio Committee, which we heard about from *Georgi Makogonenko*. For a day or two Olga Bergholtz saw before her a man who could have easily caused the death of his own family—an employee at the radio who had lost his ration cards—and unable to bear it any longer she gave him hers, although she was suffering from dystrophy herself by then. To put it plainly—one human being simply gave up her life for the sake of another, someone she was little acquainted with and not even interested in. Olga Bergholtz, well aware of the harsh realities, certainly did not count on what happened next: other colleagues rallied round in order to help her hold out till the end of the month. And they succeeded in doing so...

And that was another true side of the blockade. Without cancelling out anything else, it nevertheless added an alternative note—that of elevated tragedy. Human beings are capable of a great deal, of great things, indeed, yet how bitter it is to know that life comes back repeatedly with demands of yet more unthinkable sacrifices.

WHAT SUPPORTED THE SPIRIT

Olga Bergholtz did not make any attempt to try and explain the reasons for her action. Nobility of spirit does not require substantiation. It is the mean and base that need vindication. Even weakness is often disguised under the pretext of necessity, and it goes without saying that mercenary motives, any variations of egotism, and even more so, dishonour, are all convincingly eloquent, providing a mass of excuses, and invoking justification from psychology, economics, and history.

It is startling how the blockade tore away all disguises, exposed people, ruthlessly bringing to light every facet of a person's nature.

It is worth continuing the story of Makogonenko, then an active worker at the Leningrad Radio Committee. It is of interest and significance because of the events it describes, and also of the narrator's attitude towards them.

“The Radio Committee during the blockade comprised of a few hundred people who, by their work, provided spiritual food for the city. It was an organisation that worked round the clock, without interruption... All sorts of people worked there. Among them was a very good man, an old friend of mine—we'd been to school together. He was a bright, honest, educated, charming person. He had a university education and a thoroughly reliable worker's background. A straightforward hard-working lad, a very subtle philosopher, a man of refined intellect and great charm. He had done a great deal for the Leningrad Radio. The only reason I won't give any more details is that if I mentioned his actual work, his name would become known, and I would not like it to be linked with this

story. I just want to use his case as an example of what the blockade did to people, of the trials and tests it set them. I would like to stress once more, to make you and everyone else who may think about this understand, that he was a rare, exceedingly honest person. Besides everything else, he was in love with Olga Bergholtz—hopelessly in love. He knew she had a husband, whom she loved, who was ill, and yet he still loved her with a simple undemanding love. This manifested itself in his incredibly tender attitude towards her, in the consideration and attention which she found so touching. And then came a test of fate!

“On the fourth of December 1941 I said my goodbyes to all my friends. Early in the morning on the fifth I was leaving to travel across the ring of encirclement in accordance with an order from the Political Department. I said goodbye to everyone. But, as it happened, I received the documents authorising my departure on the fifth only at ten o'clock in the evening, at the Smolny, and returned home only by eleven. Just in case, I had taken my leave of Olga Bergholtz earlier on. She had by then left (this was before she began to live at the Radio Committee house). My trip was to last two weeks and I planned to give my ration cards to Olga Bergholtz, because she had been taking what meagre food she had in her rations to her husband in hospital. But I had no idea where I could find her. She could not spend the night at her own place in Rubenstein Street—it was too cold there—so she used to stay with various women-friends. Consequently, I had no idea where to look for her. Who could I ask to help? Victor Khodorenko, chairman of our Radio Committee? But that did not seem appropriate under the circumstances. An employee at the Radio, I meant to leave without handing my ration cards over to my colleagues, but wanted to give them to Olga Bergholtz who did work for us but was not on staff. I decided that it would be better to leave them with this friend of mine, who was in love with her. Who else? And I gave them to him to pass on to Olga Bergholtz the following morning (she was supposed to come in to do her broadcast, she came to the Radio every day). Just to make sure, I asked him: ‘Do you give me your word you’ll hand them over to her?’ He replied: ‘You ought to be ashamed of even asking such a question!’

“In two weeks time I returned. I had been to that Guards division which was fighting at the point of the breakthrough, a battle which, unfortunately, was to no avail. This was Krasnov’s division. As I was leaving the division—everybody knew, of course, that I was returning to Leningrad—I was supplied with two knapsacks filled with dried food and bread. I couldn’t take much bread, for Krasnov’s division wasn’t allotted black bread, but light, puffy *kalachi*! The only time I can recall eating anything like them was during my childhood on the Volga. I said: ‘Friends! I just can’t take one *kalach* with me!’ (It took up so much space I could only fit one into my knapsack.) ‘We’ve no black bread,’ they said, ‘but you can take as many *kalachi* as you like.’ So I had to squash these *kalachi* into flat cakes, I could get more in that way...

“My return journey is a whole story in itself. A most amazing affair. I’ll just say a few words about it. I must admit I was not brave enough to take the route across the Ladoga, although by that time transport was

already running. Having already experienced one dipping, I had little desire to repeat the performance. So I set off for the flight unit and found out which planes were flying to Leningrad, and from where. I was given an address. I arrived there and discovered an amazing thing! That's what Leningrad and all-Russian comradeship means! I was in a building designated for the evacuated families of airmen working on different sectors of the front. These pilots sent letters such as: 'The Volkhov Front. To the Flight Unit. Friends! I have a wife (father, family) in Leningrad. Get them out! Address...' And this unit would send planes to Leningrad to search for people. Often they found corpses. Those alive would be airlifted out. An entire house was given over to them and later they were moved to the rear (wherever that was supposed to be!). They would pop in like good spirits, these sky-birds! They'd find their way to the soldier's families, who didn't even know where their husbands or fathers were, knock on the door and with the words: 'I've come to fetch you', whisk them off by car, and later send them away by plane. That was a really incredible facet of the city's life! I spent 24 hours amongst these women, children and old men who'd been flown out of Leningrad. They would ask me, the women especially: 'And where are you going?' I'd say, 'To Leningrad.' There was something deeply moving, heart-warming, human in the way they tried to persuade me: 'Stop and think where you're going, you're young, after all, why do you want to go there to certain death? Don't go there!' They were in tears although they'd never even met me before. And when I told them that I had been there and was now only going back, they would say: 'No, you're not telling the truth! If you'd seen what's happening there, you'd never even consider going!' But that's not my main point.

"So I returned. The first thing I did upon coming back was to bring some food to Olga Bergholtz. And I noticed some sort of a change in her—not leanness (she was not thin, she was beginning to grow bloated), but an unusual, uncharacteristic kind of greed in her attitude to food. I asked: 'Olga, what's wrong with you? You've been having it a bit easier lately!' She answered: 'Have I?' 'Well the ration card, my worker's card!' She said: 'You're heartless. You knew perfectly well how hard it's been for me and yet you went away and didn't even leave me your card.' 'What do you mean I didn't? I gave it to him!' 'I don't believe it! He would have passed it on to me.' 'But I know I didn't take the card with me! All right, then,' I said (I had arrived back late at night), 'we will go to see him tomorrow and...' 'No, certainly not!' she said. 'You behaved badly, and you've no cause to cast aspersions on such a person!' I said: 'Let's not argue. We'll talk it over tomorrow.'

"And so came the day of our conversation—that terrible Judgement Day. He did not deny anything. The fact that he made no denials, together with the excuse he put forward—that was certainly the most horrifying thing! To deviate slightly—he was an obsessed man, in the best possible sense. But by then there was already something within him which I labelled as the Robespierre syndrome. As a friend I tried to warn him of its danger. The fixed idea he was possessed with was this. A lot is going wrong all round. And the main reason for it is that in the prevailing cir-

cumstances it is impossible to pick out the truly valuable members of society, thereby indiscriminately allowing anyone at all to take up necessary and important posts. The war, the blockade are the quintessence of all possible difficulties, the most unbearable of trials. It will be clear to anyone in the future that the person who came through these trials must be the one to give guidance to the rest! So this was his reasoning: 'I command the deepest respect in intellectual circles. I emerge from the trials and, quite obviously, there are no two ways about it—I am put in charge of ideas!' Which was why he said: 'I'm sorry, dearest Olya, but what I have to do is of greater importance. And that is why I didn't hand over the ration cards, I wasn't guided by personal considerations, but by the fact that I can offer more to society. It took a lot of thinking before I finally reached the decision that I was the more valuable!' "

"And Olga Bergholtz' talent?"

"At that time Olga Bergholtz was not as yet the poet she was to become later. Then, in December, Olga was one of the rank-and-file workers, who conscientiously carried out work delegated by the Radio Committee."

"Did he try himself as a writer or was simply an administrator?"

"Generally speaking he had the ability to write. But he applied himself wholeheartedly to this other cause which I have already spoken of. Olga Bergholtz said to him: 'I can understand you, but you are gravely mistaken. You are deluding yourself, and I feel sorry for you.' That's one incident that happened, one man's character. And here's another incident associated with another person," continued Georgi Makogonenko. "It also happened at the Radio Committee, whose chairman was then Victor Khodorenko. At first I found him a man of unusual, unexpected character. There was something soldierly, something of an army commander about him (although he had never served in the army); he was extremely well-organised, was resolute and quick to take decisions, and his reactions were instantaneous. But, more significantly, he made me warm to him by his kindly attitude to people, his confidence in them and his understanding nature. He did a great many good things for the Radio Committee, for radio broadcasting, which meant, in turn, that Leningraders were able to listen to and truly feel the pulse of life through our broadcasts. But I want to speak not so much about his work, as about an instance which tested his character. Some time in November—not straight-away, but only in November—the appropriate organisations made the decision to include him among those workers, probably of the middle echelon, who received meals at the Smolny, in No. 12 canteen. One was offered three meals a day there. Well, he was unable to go three times a day—due as much to work as to lack of energy, and there was no transport running. He used to go once a day. By that time he was unbelievably emaciated as he had been on standard rations for many months. For perhaps three days he consumed everything that was provided at the canteen. After that came the test. I can remember him arriving at ten o'clock, calling myself and that friend of mine in to see him and saying: 'The situation is as follows—I go there, get fed, and the menu is such-and-such. It's not possible for me to eat all this myself, I don't consider it

proper, especially as I can eat bread there. I have been forbidden (everyone gets that warning!) to bring bread out but these things I can take out.' He then took out of his briefcase and unwrapped two lumps of sugar, two cutlets, some porridge and a pie. 'I have a proposal to make: to distribute it personally would be humiliating. You are in charge of the department. Let's make a list of staff members, every day I will bring something back, and we'll distribute it so that someone gets sugar, another—some other food, and yet a third—something else.' "

"Did he have a family?"

"He had a girlfriend, but that didn't interfere... I think that looking at it in purely practical terms, when you recall our rations (up until spring most of the employees at the Radio didn't even have a worker's card, but were on office worker's rations, which meant 150 grammes, and later 125 grammes, of bread)—to suddenly receive an additional lump of sugar, or a cutlet, or a couple of spoonfuls of good porridge—is something that can't be underestimated. Yet the tremendous moral effect it had on us is difficult even to describe!"

Russian notions of an "intellectual", of a "cultivated" person are hard to define precisely, no interpretation of these words ever seems sufficient. Similarly with the notion of "decency"; it seems to have a variety of interpretations and yet its meaning is historically defined; it is recognisable, always precisely understood. If you say that someone is a decent person—everyone has a pretty exact idea of what is meant by those words. The concept of a "cultivated" person is also something you recognise immediately. It manifested itself in many different ways during the blockade, but in people's diaries and reminiscences it was easily recognisable by a special radiance in one's thoughts and mental activity, by one's sense of what is right. Last but not least, such a person expressed himself in the way he, with the aid of all these moral resources, managed to preserve his better self in the struggle with hunger and despair.

Alexander Dymov, producer at the theatrical studio attached to the Palace of Culture, forced himself to think and take a deeper look at things, and that at the most desperate of times.

"12th January, midday. It's grown colder, the room is freezing. Mila has gone to the shop in the hope of getting something on the ration cards. We haven't been able to buy any food for a long time. It pains me to look at her, she's become so thin, poor thing.

"I feel pretty bad. This substance of doubtful composition, which I consume under the guise of 'bread', my stomach categorically refuses to digest.

"Sometimes people smile. And then their faces become very queer: their smiles have taken on a new and peculiar dimension, making their skin stretch tautly over their cheekbones. By the way, about smiling. Humour is a wonderful thing. There's very little of it left. Just as laughter, it is bestowed sparingly, rationed out exactly like other commodities.



But it still exists. Yesterday in the canteen an elderly woman said to the waitress, handing her a coupon for cereal: 'Here's your cerealised coupon.' And many of the people sitting near her broke into silent smiles. A few months ago they would have broken into laughter, loud, in a variety of keys, as likely as not. Now their laughter is silent and as sparing as the food those people eat: of microscopic proportions.

"One and all have a single dream—evacuation. To leave Leningrad, to go anywhere, so long as they get a hunk of real bread. Evacuation has ceased long ago: there are no routes by which people can get out—yet they dream sweet dreams about it, sitting in the gloom of their own frozen rooms, staggering along the deserted, snowbound streets, queuing up by the empty shelves in the shops, at work, in the canteens.

"What an incredible thing is this feeling of hunger. One can get used to it as to a chronic headache. For two successive days I have been waiting with blind resignation for one glutinous piece of bread, without experiencing acute hunger. That means the disease (i.e. hunger) has gone over from the acute stage to the chronic.

"It's dark. I couldn't stop myself from getting out that precious candle-end, hidden away in case of dire emergency. The darkness is terribly oppressive. Mila's dozing on the sofa. She is smiling in her sleep, she must be dreaming of a sandwich with smoked sausage or of thick barley soup. Every night she has appetising dreams, which is why waking up is especially tormenting for her.

"The entire flat is appallingly cold, everything is frozen, stepping out into the corridor involves putting on one's coat, galoshes and hat. The bleakness of desolation everywhere. The water supply is non-existent, we have to fetch water from more than three kilometres away. The sewage system is a thing of the distant past—the yard is full of muck. This is like some other city, not Leningrad, always so proud of its European, dandyish appearance. To see it now is like meeting a man you have become accustomed to seeing dressed in a magnificent, thick woolen overcoat, sporting clean gloves, a fresh collar, and good American boots. And here you suddenly meet that same man completely transformed—clothed in tatters, filthy, unshaven, with foul-smelling breath and a dirty neck, with rags on his feet instead of boots.

"Yesterday's *Leningradskaya Pravda* published an article by the chairman of the Leningrad Soviet, comrade Popkov, entitled 'On the Leningrad Food Situation'. After calling on all citizens to summon their courage and patience, comrade Popkov goes on to speak of the very real problems of theft and abuse in Leningrad's food distribution network.

"My candle-end has almost burnt down. Soon darkness will descend upon me—until morning...

"17th January. Old age. Old age is the fatigue of well-worn components that are involved in the working of a human body, an exhaustion of man's inner resources. Your blood no longer keeps you warm, your legs refuse to obey you, your back grows stiff, your brain grows feeble, your memory fades. The pace of old age is as unhurried as the slow combustion of the almost burnt-out logs in a stove: the flames die away, lose their colour, one log disintegrates into golden embers, then another—and now the last

flickering blue flames are fading—it will soon be time to shut off the flue.

"We are, all of us, old people now. Regardless of our age. The pace of old age now governs our bodies and our feelings... Yesterday at the market I saw a little girl of about nine, wearing enormous felt boots which were full of holes. She was bartering a chunk of dubious-looking brawn—probably made from dog meat—for 100 grammes of bread. Her eyes, hardly visible beneath a pair of heavy lids, looked terribly tired, her back was bent, her gait slow and shuffling, her face puckered and the corners of her mouth turned down. It was the face of an old woman. Can this ever be forgotten or forgiven?

"...What I am writing is tedious, humdrum and monotonous. But to me these notes are a safety valve, a release for my growing despair, from the agony of days of starvation. I wanted to write down just the plain harsh facts, but it hasn't worked out that way. I can't help it. How else can I fill in time, distract myself from the horrors of our everyday life?

"23rd January, 11 a.m. Slowly, laboriously, like emaciated people toiling up a hill, the days drag by. Monotonous, unhealthy, withdrawn days in a now silent city. Leningrad's nerve centres, which have until recently kept the life of the city going, fed it vital impulses—the power stations—have ceased to function. And all the nerve fibres extending over the city lie dormant, inactive. There is no light, no trams or trolley-buses are running, the factories, cinemas, theatres have all stopped working. It is pitch black in the empty shops, chemists', canteens—their windows having been boarded up since autumn (as protection from shell fragments). Only the feeble, consumptive flame of a wick-lamp flickers on every counter... Thickly coated in snow, the tram, trolley-bus and radio cables hang listlessly above the streets. They stretch overhead like an endless white net, and there is nothing to make them shed their thick snow cover.

"The great city's nervous system has ceased its function. But we know that this is not death, but only a lethargic sleep. The time will come when the sleeping giant will stir, and then rouse himself..."

Dymov's notes have a distinct literary style. It is as if he subsequently polished them up with great care. In some places the diary is like a story written down many years after the event. We checked with Lyudmilla Shengelidze, Dymov's widow. It turned out that the diary was authentic, without corrections and revision. It was precisely as Alexander Dymov had written it by the light of a wick-lamp during the winter of 1942 up to the time he was taken off to hospital. Here, evidently, we have one of those rare cases when the diarist, right from the start, writes in a literary manner, choosing colours and comparisons, and polishing phrases. In doing this he occupied his mind and preserved his essence, in fact, provided it with nourishment. The workings of the spirit manifest themselves differently in different people. In Knyazev's diaries it was done through history and philosophy, in Ryabinkin's through self-analysis, in Dymov's through literary creativity.





"24th January, midday. This is a day of joy. The radio communique stated in the announcer's cheerful voice that our troops have retaken Rzhev, Kholm and Staraya Russa. Perhaps this news will support Mila's crushed spirit. She is losing the ability to fight—that's the most appalling thing. It pains me just to look at her—silent, palely transparent, it hurts to look into her deady tired eyes...

"25th January, 11 a.m. We lead a primitive life. Without water, without light, without warmth. Like a fantasy Time Machine, the blockade has hurled us back into the distant past—to the early 18th century, in the sense of cultural level. Though it was actually far better in the early 18th century. The people of St Petersburg were not familiar with central steam heating, but they had plenty of firewood to heat their patriarchal tiled stoves. The people of St Petersburg were not familiar with electric light, but in their rooms oil burners shone brightly, and they had fat tallow candles in abundance. But we have no electricity, no oil, no candles. The city of Peter had no water-mains, but there was a well at every corner, there were reservoirs installed and ice-holes made on the Neva, Fontanka and Moika. There was enough water for everybody. Now we have forgotten what water-mains are, but we also have no wells, no reservoirs, no yokes. Hundreds of people, carrying pitchers or kettles, stand despondently in long queues for water at a tap in a laundry that has survived some three blocks from their homes. They stand there for hours.

"The people of St Petersburg two centuries ago had no idea of what trams or trolley-buses are. But they had horses, sledges, carts, warm coats of marten or fox. The city was small—and it was no problem for someone warmly dressed to walk across it in any direction.

"We have forgotten what trams and trolley-buses were like, and we had forgotten the look of horse-drawn carriages long before that, some 15 years ago. But we have no horses, no sledges or sleighs. We're inadequately dressed. We're hungry, but are obliged to walk long distances: in two centuries the city has grown immeasurably, and its average diameter is now 30 kilometres.

"25th January, 8 p.m. Goodness only knows the extent to which the significance of that hitherto humble, little respected organ—the ordinary human stomach—has grown these days. In consequence of unemployment and frequent waste of time due to the lack of raw material, that food-processing organ has taken upon itself an uncharacteristic function—all thoughts and emotions are subject to its editorial control. At any rate, the quality of my thoughts and emotions is clearly of gastric origin. And not only mine. I am constantly aware of this crude interference of my stomach in my intellectual and emotional sphere. I do not in the least like its dictate. After all, apart from digestion, there are also world literature, philosophy, art, and technical invention. You take a book, turn over a few pages. It's a novel. 'With a gesture of indifference Branton invited them to the table. On the white expanse of the tablecloth...' No, I am forbidden to read further. It is contraindicated. It is a case of direct influence of the ideological superstructure (literature) on the basis (the stomach). You take another book. 'Your behaviour, my dear, provides food for all kinds of rumours...' Halt. You oughtn't to read any further.

'Food!' The much respected editor of my sense organs (my stomach) swiftly directs them along the lines of edible associations, although the word 'food' is clearly used metaphorically in the book. 'Grief gnaws at my heart,' it says on page 35. That is also a metaphor. But my unsophisticated editor could not care less. What is important to him is to invoke in my imagination the act of gnawing fat pieces of roasted meat. Perhaps with long-forgotten rosy-brown potatoes. These are cases of the associative influence of the superstructure on the basis.

" 'Much respected citizen editor! Comrade Stomach! I am weak and feeble. I have great difficulty dragging my feet, and my face has long ago got out of the habit of smiling. I have been hungry for a long time, my hunger is incurable, chronic like rheumatism. But I am fighting, fighting not to fall down, for death quickly tramples upon the fallen. So far I am hanging on, and am even writing these notes—"Notes from a Dead City". That is all true. And I have not yet stopped thinking, reading books, and at times I still have the urge to indulge in some philosophising. You, citizen editor, prevent me from doing all this. Every moment I am conscious of your power, of your oppression, your interference in my internal affairs. Let's be friends, you don't have to torture me. You want me to look at everything around with *your* eyes. You insist on that. And in the majority of cases you succeed. But that's unnatural, I protest, I demand that you once again work at your primary speciality, freeing from your tutelage and direct influence those spheres that are beyond you. I want to read books and appreciate their content just as I did in the past, and not in your interpretation, and not from your narrow, prejudiced viewpoint. I refuse to think of nothing but gorging. I want to think of many other things which have nothing whatsoever to do with it. I want to dream of the future, the beautiful future. But not beautiful because it will be stuffed to the brim with potatoes, bread and sunflower-seed oil. You understand, I want to be a human being. Don't stand in the way. Believe me, it'll be better for you, too. Otherwise both you and I will be ashamed of this time in our lives.

" 'Abdicate your role of dictator. Go about your modest business conscientiously, relax—after all, at the moment you haven't all that much work to do. Good luck to you. Accept my sincere respects. Your obedient servant, A. Dymov.'

"That is approximately the content of my 'Letter to the Editor' as it has formed in my brain. But I haven't sent it. It's useless. M'lord Stomach is a boor and a philistine. He won't understand and will not give up his power over me...

"I am too verbose. That's bad. But I so want to do something to fill the gaping emptiness of these endless evenings.

"Now it is evening again. Just like dozens of others—ice-cold, silent and slow-moving. Outside it's dark and frosty. Long-range guns are thundering—the enemy hasn't forgotten about us. The blockade. Before me is a tiny wick-lamp, which now and then enables me to write. Sometimes it does not want to burn and, winking the cunning yellow eye of the wick, goes out. Then I am plunged into darkness."

You had to have a profound sense of humour, the ability to be ironic about yourself, in order to compose such an appeal to your stomach, sitting before a dimly flickering wick-lamp. It was rare that people preserved their sense of humour at that time, and it would probably be correct to assume that Dymov had an inherent talent for humour. As in any tragedy, now and again in the besieged Leningrad there arose funny situations, they were simply not noticed and were only sometimes understood afterwards, with hindsight. For instance, a major from an anti-aircraft defence unit, demobilised after being wounded, speaks thus about his wedding:

“When in March I brought her out of the Leningrad blockade, she was an old woman—grey, shrivelled, doubled up. She was hardly able to walk. She was only skin and bone. I took her with me to ‘mainland’ Russia. There, in the space of six months, she gained strength, straightened up and month by month grew younger. Her eyes began to shine and ceased to be sunken in their sockets, her hair began to come to life, too, and grow thicker. Her skin became smooth again. Then her cheeks grew rosy. She regained her youth, was transformed from an old woman into a girl who was pleasant to look at. And as time went on she grew younger and younger still, becoming such a young and beautiful girl that I felt awkward about marrying her.”

The vestiges of that distant embarrassment can still be felt here and there in his narrative, but all this has long ago turned into an amusing story, an anecdote which he relates with laughter...

THE RING NARROWS

From the beginning of December Yura Ryabinkin stopped meeting his friends, for he no longer had either the strength or the opportunity for social meetings. Nor did he go to school, and it was probably closed anyway, so there remained only his family—Mother and Ira—and the people who shared their flat. Growing weaker, and at times slipping into a semi-delirious state, he tried to focus his inquisitiveness on those people. His world was narrowing, but all the same it was infinitely interesting to him in all its trifling details. Every individual was a universe, was a riddle, a mystery worthy of reflection. With increasing application he tried to penetrate into the character of Anfisa Nikolayevna, to understand her. The moment his mother became ill, he would forget all his grievances, his youthful egotism would be discarded—to return anew a day or two later. But these “ebb tides” laid bare the basic essence of Yura Ryabinkin: his conscientious nature, self-exactingness and, what was even more striking, his desperate inner struggle to preserve his former self, not to give in, to hold out... For this he wanted to know who and what he was.



"2nd December. What's this torture Mum and Ira arrange for me in the evenings? At the table Ira deliberately eats slowly, not only to get the utmost enjoyment from her food, but also so that she can feel that here she is, eating, while the others, who have already eaten, are sitting and looking at her with hungry eyes. Mum eats hers up first, then takes a little from each of us. When the bread's being divided Ira bursts into tears if my piece is half a gramme heavier than hers. Ira's always with Mum. I'm only with her in the evenings, and see a bit more of her in the morning. Maybe that's why Ira's always in the right... I'm apparently an egotist, as Mum has told me. But I remember how I was friends with Volodya Shmailov and then I never distinguished between what was mine and what was his. Then it was Mum herself who was the egotist. She would not give Volodya books which I had two copies of, and so on. Why has she been trying to mould my character ever since then? And it's still not too late for her to change it...

"Once I had to eat two or three dinners in the canteen, plus a filling supper, and breakfast, and also have snacks in order to satisfy my appetite for the day. And now I have to be satisfied with 100 g of biscuits in the morning, nothing during the day, and in the evening a plate of soup or slop. Apart from that, water. Water under the name of tea, coffee, soup and simply water. That's my menu.

"As regards evacuation, it looks like everything's fallen through again. Almost. Mum's afraid of going now. 'You'll find yourself,' she says, 'in an unfamiliar area...' And so on and so forth."

Evacuation! It was not only the Ryabinkins who repeated this word. Thousands of families were trying to get away, doing their best to go with the first evacuation trains in order to save themselves from starvation. They insisted, petitioned for it. But there were others who had to be told: "Evacuate!" It was essential to single out those who needed to be evacuated immediately, without delay. Apart from what was being done to organise the Road of Life, the district Party committees carried out tremendous work, so far generally little known, inside the city—the Communists went from house to house, from flat to flat.

"I was a volunteer political instructor at the Vyborg district committee," *Ekaterina Yanishevskaya* told us, "and, in the winter of 1942, representative Vorobyov and I helped evacuate people from Finskaya Street. We arrived at one home accompanied by the yardkeeper. It was dark. In one corner there was the dim flame of a wick-lamp. A woman was lying there. I came up to her with the wick-lamp and the light fell on her pale face. She was silent, she looked at us with lifeless eyes and waved a hand towards the corner. A small girl lay there. She was like a skeleton. Totally emaciated. Vorobyov had some spirit with him. We gave them a few drops. The spirit immediately warmed them up. They both became livelier, even happier somehow. Their eyes lit up. Of course, there was no question of evacuating them. We sent them to a special hospital... When in

April the Road of Life ceased to operate, I was summoned to the district committee and it was proposed that I should go as director of a subsidiary farm to Kolomyaga and conduct the sowing there."

Meanwhile Yura Ryabinkin's affairs were going from bad to worse.

"3rd December. Mum is ill. Today she didn't go to work. She's running a temperature, her bones are aching, and her legs feel heavy... Can it be dropsy? It's hard as it is, and now... I can't write any more. I'm in such low spirits. I'm sitting in the kitchen, firewood's crackling in the stove, and on the chest by it my sick mother lies... Oh goodness!

"According to the communique Tikhvin's been captured by the Germans. Sevastopol is continuing to maintain its defence.

"Mum is ill, Ira is only a child, as for Tina, we don't even know her address. I'm totally exhausted, worn out, I can barely stand up... What's going to happen to us all?

"4th December. Been busy all day. I got up early, did a quick run round the bakeries and got some sugar biscuits, after which I went to the polyclinic in Pravda Street with the idea of calling a doctor for Mother—but it doesn't attend to people in our area. So I also had to go to Matyanin Lane, to another polyclinic. Then it was back to the queues, to chopping firewood, and to suffering.

"Mum's been discharged from the regional committee (because of her prospective evacuation.—A.A., D.G.). As regards her evacuation and warm clothing (...). Now Mum's lying ill. The doctor who came to see her found that she had flu and something wrong with her heart, hence her swollen legs, pains in her sides and so on. The treatment should be proper nourishment. But there is none. So here we are: Mum's laid up, she's seriously ill, she has no job now. The chances are that evacuation will be on foot. Yet it's hardly likely that people such as ourselves—Mother with her swollen legs, Ira with her lack of strength and myself, with my numerous anxieties for them as well as myself—would ever be able to cover much of that 300-kilometre snow-bound distance on foot, or would stand up to a month's travelling... Especially not with luggage of close on 60 kilograms or over in weight. So here is the last act of the tragedy: we'll either end up, frozen and ill, in some hospital in the middle of nowhere, or continue to drag out our miserable lives here, bloated and exhausted by constant hunger.

"That is all I am capable of saying today, or rather, of writing. I remain indifferent to news from the fronts, be it good or otherwise, apathetic to all political events. What is happening around us here, in the flat? Our neighbours are leaving by air on December 6, the Turanosovs, too, are flying out on the 5th or 6th, Gromov and his family are going to be evacuated in the next few days, the Katsuras are leaving for Tashkent... Yet Mum is ill, she needs nourishing food, which is not obtainable anywhere, she needs rest and no worry. I'm exhausted, emaciated, Ira's worn out too. What's to be done?

"5th December. Mum's right, one must always look on the bright side. We must believe that we will be evacuated. It has to be like that. And it will. Although Mother can barely walk—she will get better, although Ira complains of pains in her left side—the pain will soon cease. Although Mum and I have nothing to wear, no felt boots or warm clothing—we will break out of this hungry prison—Leningrad. But meantime, evening has fallen, an air raid is in progress, there's the booming of ack-ack guns, and the sound of bombs exploding... It's like a sinister lottery, where the winner's lot is life, the loser's death. Such is life. The I.'s are not leaving tomorrow. They'll leave in a few days. Lucky people...

"Hunger. Merciless hunger!

"Gradually, a bit at a time, the image of Anfisa Nikolayevna rebuilds itself in my mind. I recall her in scenes of quarrels with her husband, during which they would both reveal part of their past lives, or in my conversations with the two of them, and now, as if through the misty haze, this image has emerged with still greater distinctness after I heard I.'s heartfelt and sorrowful story.

"Anfisa Nikolayevna is 27. From the age of 14 she loved, or rather was the mistress of, some coarse man who, by use of force and uncouth behaviour, already in those days got her accustomed to drinking. Since then she has been unable to keep away from wine, vodka, etc. She's had fits of delirium, lying drunk in the street... But she was incredibly beautiful and charming when sober. This must have been when I. had met her. Some time after, he received a letter from her in which she begged him, under the influence of some effort at reform, to 'rescue her from this filthy hole', to marry her. So he abandoned his first wife and daughter for her sake. A new life began for her. The husband earnt 2,000 a month, the wife spent 40 roubles a day. They went to sanatoriums, he tried every available measure to break his wife's drinking habit, they had arguments over money... I. is not of a completely balanced mind himself—he was once in a psychiatric hospital. And his wife often left him without any money whatsoever before payday, spending it all on drink. But at the same time, when sober, Anfisa is undoubtedly a person with a wonderful temperament. It's possible, of course, that it's all put on for show, but all the same... In any case, it's very difficult indeed to get to know Anfisa Nikolayevna's character.

"6th December. Eleven o'clock in the morning. The I.'s have not left. Their departure has been postponed for two or three days. Mother and Ira have gone off to the regional committee. Mum now has quite a few things to take care of. The document granting permission to leave the city either by train or by plane, or else inclusion in the same group as I.'s. Then she needs warm clothing and I need a pair of felt boots with leather soles, and we also have to have a lock put on the door. But Mum's got very little strength left now. For strength, you need food. Food is the priority requirement. Food is the only source of energy for the body.

"Mum's been notified of her destination. We are to be evacuated to Barnaul, or rather, the surrounding area. It all boils down to two things in the end: by what means we go and what we wear. Turanosova was due to leave by air this morning. But the reply from the Smolny, by all appearan-

ces, has not yet come. That's bad. It would be nice if we could be attached to I.'s group.

"Mum has another two difficulties to face up to. The first is to secure our financial position through the regional committee and by selling a few of our belongings; the second—to reach agreement on the question of dismissal, which will be far easier by comparison.

"And so, delay is caused, firstly, by lack of warm clothing, and, secondly, by the uncertainty as to our means of transportation.

"There is one other major problem—and that is food. Without it we won't be able to take ourselves anywhere... We can only hold out till about the 13th or 14th, no later, or possibly only the 9th or 10th...

"Yesterday Anfisa Nikolayevna gave us about 300 grammes of peas thinking she was leaving today. Now if she'd given us 800-900 grammes!

"I still have a number of big tasks to accomplish. To get rid of the lice, go to a bath-house and the barber's, to clear my books away, to get some firewood from somewhere, to draw our rations and tie up the loose ends at school. I feel that the day's not far away now when I'll overstrain myself and have to take to my bed. But if I do get laid up, that'll be that.

"I didn't read any newspapers yesterday, I know nothing, have no clue as to what's going on. Things are pretty bad on our Leningrad Front—that I know for sure. Yesterday I heard whilst in some queue that the evacuation on foot going on across Lake Ladoga had been stopped. People were handed out white camouflage cloaks. And wearing them, they walked 80 kilometres non-stop across the ice, through the blizzard, without any food. Many were not able to endure the journey and died.

"There's a popular song: 'Seek and you shall find, knock and the door shall open! ' I'll try to follow it as a guide.

"It's obvious that we can expect no help whatsoever from Tina. She's now got other things to spend her wages on. The luckiest member of our family. In her last letter from Kirov she wrote that she was more or less well. And yet two or three months ago she was complaining from Boksitogorsk of the shortage of sweet foodstuffs. Which only goes to show that she must be O.K. now with regard to food. She has free choice of all sorts of delicacies, and doesn't even give a second's thought to bread. Yet is she thinking of us? Is she? And what is she thinking about us? Is she aware of the starvation in Leningrad, the bombing, the artillery fire? Or maybe she's just indulging her appetite? Anything's possible. I'm so ravenous nowadays that to share even the smallest of morsels with Mother is not something I can force myself to do. I'm left with such a painful, oppressive feeling in my heart from the mere thought of this morning, and I know that that's how it will be in the future if I don't check myself now... But how to check myself. It hurts, it pains me..."

So even the family's favourite, aunt Tina, was picked on by poor Yura, who was totally distracted by his hungry hopelessness! He is well aware that he's being unjust. It was not likely she would have forgotten how difficult things were for them, that would have been out of character. Aunt Tina had always helped them, even to the point of making

Yura feel uncomfortable (judging by his previous diary entries)—she was so kind and so generous towards them. (And we also know something Yura was never to find out: how after the war this woman sought and managed to find the orphaned Ira in some distant children's home outside Vologda. She took her back to Leningrad, brought her up, and gave her an education.)

But at that point Yura feels absolutely miserable and he now sees everyone around him (himself included) as such incredible egoists that he does not even want to make any exception for faraway Tina. In fact, he is particularly hurtful towards her (saying she is "indulging her appetite"), because his hopes in her had been especially strong, she was, perhaps, his only hope... And another thing: his mother is ill, and Yura finds himself unable ("...not something I can force myself to do...") to share a small morsel of bread with her. So he looks around for someone else—but someone well-fed, someone successful!—to accuse of the same misdoing. And singles out his much-loved aunt!

Of course, there is a kind of suffering that can make the heart more tender, help a person perceive, even understand, other people's anguish, allow him to respond to it in a way that would have been impossible at an earlier time, when that same person was content in his well-being. But then there is suffering of a kind that embitters people: what have I done, why should I have to be the one to suffer, why are others free of this anguish, while I (we) go through such agony? Questions of that nature make a person antagonistic to other people and not to evil itself.

How many accusations Yura levelled at his neighbour Anfisa Nikolayevna! Yet it only needs a quick revision of the facts, having set aside Yura's emotions, to discover that Anfisa Nikolayevna shared her food with the Ryabinkins, giving Yura extra things to eat despite his caustic remarks, and so far deliberately ignoring the fact that he stole food from her saucepan.

From time to time Yura attempts to restore justice, and to recognise the kindness and even generosity of this woman, to take an interest in her fate. By all accounts, she also takes a sufficiently critical attitude towards herself in her stories... While trying to understand Yura we cannot help noticing how he occasionally lets black, harsh thoughts creep into his mind.

"7th December. A number of interesting things happened yesterday. Having O.K.'d things first with Gromov, mother illegally appropriated an office worker's ration card belonging to a certain Sukharev, who had been removed from the regional committee register. Yesterday, using that card, we bought 200 g of macaroni, 350 g of sweets and 125 g of bread. And, with the exception of the macaroni, we consumed it all at once. Mum was also given a letter to the secretary of the district Soviet about being supplied with some oilcake. Nothing'll come of it, that's for sure. Turanosova promised to give Mother a pair of old felt boots today, but I wasn't able to go and collect them this morning—it was so cold outdoors. Yesterday Bushuyeva called while Mum was out, she's intending

to evacuate on foot tomorrow, and promised to call in around six this evening.

"These next ten days will decide our fate... The two main problems that need to be resolved are what to wear during the trip and who to go with. Oh, if only I could have at least a couple of satisfying meals. Otherwise where am I supposed to find the energy and strength to stand up to all the difficulties that lie ahead... Mum's ill again. She's only had three hours' sleep last night, from three till six in the morning. I really need to go to Turanosova's to get those warm clothes she promised. But it's so cold out in the street, my body feels so weak, that I'm afraid to even take one step outside.

"I started writing my diary in the beginning of summer, and now it's winter... Did I ever imagine that anything like this would come of my diary?

"I've begun to save up a little money. Now I already have 56 roubles in hand, about which fact only I am aware. The stove has gone out, and it's gradually becoming very cold in the kitchen. I'll have to put my coat on to keep myself warm. Imagine me, shivering all over in my own flat and yet wanting to go to Siberia! I am convinced that all I need is some food—and my melancholy will disperse, together with my low spirits; the feeling of weariness will pass, the power of speech be restored and I will again become a human being and not a mere shadow...

"Every evening Anfisa Nikolayevna's brother Igor comes round, she stuffs him till he eats his head off, she's given him the entire stock of rusks. As things stand, if she is evacuated now, she won't leave us anything whatsoever. She might, perhaps, leave us the coupon to receive half a litre of milk every day at the TB clinic by the Klinsky market. But this area is shelled every single day, so it's not only a long distance to walk there but a danger to your life as well.

"I have now lost approximately 10-15 kilograms, not more. Possibly less, but that would only be because I take in so much water. There was a time when I never drank more than one and a half glasses of tea in the morning, but now even six can't satisfy me.

"8th December. Today ... today I lost Sukharev's ration card for butter, covering the first ten days of the month, the very same that Mum had illegally appropriated. And now ... what am I to do? I'm frightened, even terrified that this whole business of us using Sukharev's card will come to light, and then... Then we'll all have to pay for it, myself, Mum and even Ira... I am sure I lost it in the trust canteen—I may have forgotten to take it back from the woman who served me. I just hope it doesn't go any further... I just hope... I don't know whether to talk to Mum on the subject. If she's in a good mood—and that's not likely—I'll talk to her, if not—I'll keep quiet about the loss.

"The pain, the cruel anguish I feel at the loss of the card! I can't even think of anything else.

"And another outcome (only a possibility—A.A., D.G.). The ration card got lost at home and is found by Anfisa Nikolayevna. She raises the obvious question: how did we (there's no one else) come to have that card? She then notices the stamp—regional committee of the building

union. And up until recently that stamp had been in Mum's safe-keeping. She brings all this to the attention of Nikolai Matveyevich, and he, in turn, finds out who Sukharev is—after which Mum goes before the tribunal, is expelled from the Party, and shot...

"It's now three in the afternoon, while Mum left for work at nine in the morning. What can she be doing? Surely this day must bring the idea of evacuation at least a step closer to reality. We've got to leave, we've got to! It's the most urgent problem. And then there is the question of warm clothes, without warm clothes you can't go anywhere.

"9th December. Mum found she had the ration card. I bought 200 g of sour cream on it yesterday, which we ate there and then. And today we ate a bit more of the 100 g of fat left over from yesterday, and we'll be lucky if there's even 15 g left.

"Yesterday Mum managed to get two padded jackets and two pairs of warm trousers and brought them home. The next thing we've got to get is felt boots.

"The question of the plane flight has not been resolved. But I still cherish the hope that we'll leave by air. I. and his wife were not granted seats on a flight, yet Katsura's wife was allowed to fly all the way to Vologda. At any rate, you can never be sure. At one stage the dispatch of people was on a regular basis but now I. tells me it's virtually stopped. The number of people officially registered for evacuation has dropped significantly, but there's no shortage of those wanting to be evacuated—almost anyone to whom the subject is mentioned—so the whole thing's becoming more difficult than it was before. According to I. at first three-tonne lorries were used in the evacuation and now they are only using lorries whose capacity is two times smaller."

The battle for the Road of Life was raging on both the Volkhov and Leningrad fronts, involving anti-aircraft gunners, drivers, as well as railwaymen in the struggle—all of them straining themselves to the limit.

The route across the Ladoga was under constant bombing; lorries were being destroyed, catching fire, vanishing beneath the ice, and from the bottom of the lake their headlamps continued blazing until the frost formed a new crust on the water. Over one hundred lorries were lost over that period. It was not only the shortage of drivers and repairmen, the unsatisfactory ice, and the organisational muddle that caused grave problems for the ice road. A war was in progress—where the enemy was equally capable of making observations, thinking up ideas, misleading the other side, and there were instances when he could outwit us and take the upper hand. It was not only armies the nazis fought, but the Road of Life as well. They continued to step up the bombing and shelling of the Ladoga routes. In the meantime a stinging wind had descended upon and enveloped the lake like an impenetrable white shroud. It made the lorries halt in its freezing cold expanses, it ripped out the road markers, carried the road lanterns away. What is an ice route? It is something that involves "warming up" places, medical tents, feeding posts, storehouses, lines of communication, light repair detachments, road-building teams. And all

that on the ice, on the shores of the lake.

The highway from Leningrad to Osinovets is now paved. In place of kilometre road-posts stand obelisks bearing the inscription "Road of Life". Nowadays, one after another, they simply flash past the car windows, in those days every single kilometre seemed an enormous distance. This was the road to safety, but a road marked by burnt-out lorries, discarded belongings, first-aid dug-outs, graves...

Along this highway, not far from Vsevolozhskaya, is a monument to the Road of Life and a birch wood planted nearby: nine hundred birch trees commemorating the nine hundred days of the blockade. And in Osinovets there is a large museum devoted to the Road of Life, where on a raised platform stand a 1½-tonne lorry and a small bus that had been used to ferry children and women across the Ladoga.

It seems as if this lorry has come straight from Yura Ryabinkin's diary, in which he had anxiously dwelled on the likelihood of evacuation from the city. Let us continue his entries.

"Mum has received money for evacuation from the regional committee. We counted the money yesterday, we have a little over 1,300 roubles in cash. As from December 10 Mother stops work. I feel that if we could only have a positive answer from the Smolny, it would make me happy as never before. This positive answer should come, must come, it will come because... Oh well, how can it not come?! 'Seek and you shall find, knock and the door shall open!'

"It would be good if we could leave on the 12th. On the 11th I'd use up all the ration cards for sweets for the new ten-day period and I'd chew them on the flight out. With something like that even my memories of this awful hunger wouldn't seem quite so dreadful. Just the thought of what I did—ate a cat, pinched food out of Anfisa Nikolayevna's pots, stole any extra crumb I could get from Mum and Ira, on occasion deceiving them, froze in endless queues, got into arguments and fights outside shop doors for the right to go inside and get 100 g of butter... The dirt literally grew on me, I had lice all over my body, and because of starvation I hadn't even the energy to pull myself out of a chair—my body seemed so awfully heavy! Never-ending bombings and artillery barrages, watch-duty in the school attics. At home, rows and sickening scenes about the sharing of food... I have learnt what it is to prize those crumbs of bread that I would pick off the table with my finger, and have come to understand, even if not completely, my own coarse and egoistical nature. 'Can the leopard change his spots?' goes the saying. Does that mean I will never improve my character?"

Yura's ability to view himself in an objective light is a rare quality. In the diary entry for December 9 he chastises himself in a truly Tolstoyan fashion, recording everything, glossing over nothing. He belongs to that same breed of Russian boys that Tolstoy's Nikolenka Irtenyev belonged to. Before that, in previous entries, he blamed himself for the missing

ration card, feeling shame at the fact that the card was not legally theirs, that it belonged to another. Then the fears, the horrors he is immersed in, his self-flagellation, the punishments he thinks up for himself and his mother. That is his conscience busy playing on his imagination, the delirium of his conscience.

At the start of December the Road of Life was not as yet what it later became for Leningrad. It was merely an ice road, and the ice not much good—cracking, breaking up. With such ice it was impossible to load the lorries in any real sense of the word. The German planes were bombing the track, continuous battles taking place in the sky. Our anti-aircraft defences made every effort to ward off attacks, in spite of the shortage of bomber-planes. The craters in the Ladoga ice caused lorries to go under. It also became difficult to bring supplies of food to Ladoga because the main road to Tikhvin had been cut off and the lorries had to travel across impassable roads. Which meant that so far the city was receiving very little via the ice road, around 1,200 tonnes all in all. But the units of the 54th Army were advancing south from the direction of Voibokolovo. On the 9th of December our forces were to free Tikhvin. Which then made it possible to organise regular supplies of foodstuffs to the lake and put the evacuation of the population across Ladoga on a firm foundation. The route across the lake had still to be provided with reliable cover from the air, with anti-aircraft artillery, and had to be protected by army forces entrenched on the shore. The lorries had to be put in running condition. They broke down frequently, there was a shortage of petrol and lubricants, repairs were not always possible. So far the road did not live up to expectations and could not cope with transporting the necessary



supplies. It was only towards the tail-end of December that the daily delivery of 700 or 800-tonne loads actually began. On December 25 our forces took over in the area of Voibokolovo, following which repair work on the railroad began, consequently making it possible to transport foodstuffs to Ladoga by train and to evacuate people from the city. Now Yura had only to hold out for a short while. And it was this awareness of the rapidly declining strength of the Leningraders which spurred on the soldiers of the 54th Army in their offensive on Tikhvin. It was this urgency of what they were doing that incited the drivers of the motorised battalions and the independent motorised brigade to make two, if not three journeys daily, taking their insubstantial 1½ tonne lorries across the lake, blizzards and snowdrifts notwithstanding.

After the war one of the authors worked in the Leningrad power-supply system, in the cable network. Once, this was around 1947, the cable at one end of Ligovskaya Street was damaged. The supply of power had been cut, and an entire block was left in darkness, without electricity. We worked until evening trying to localize the fault on the cable but without success. It was winter, using picks we stabbed at the frozen ground and managed to check out a single cable sleeve, which turned out to be all right. Darkness descended. The work continued because a children's hospital and a factory had been left without power.

The work was supervised by foreman Akimov. He was a short, taciturn man, with an impeccable knowledge of the entire underground network. He, like the other foremen, had also worked in the trade during the blockade. They were all well-informed as to what was happening on their individual sectors—where a bomb had landed, when and how a house had collapsed. And this was all marked up on their blueprints. The fact was that even if a bomb or shell had not actually hit a cable, the blast was capable of disrupting insulation, shifting the earth in a way that would gradually put a strain on the cables, ripping them out of the jointing sleeves. For some years following the blockade damage of this kind continued. The rubble had been cleared away, any holes filled in, house facades repaired, and yet the shooting, shelling and bombing still seemed to go on underground, and cables would suddenly be ripped apart in the depths of long-filled-in, asphalted-over craters. The old shell blasts were rupturing the cable.

Apart from recording everything on the blueprint, a good foreman had also to retain all the details of events in his memory. What sort of a crater it had been, if it had been freezing or thawing outside, and how the shell had exploded. And if the cable had already been repaired at some earlier stage, he was to remember who had supervised those repairs—for every cableman had his own style of work, and some could be relied upon more than others. I had no idea how they had lived, worked and eaten during the blockade. I had come into the area demobilised straight from the front, and they had not been too forthright on the subject either. It is only now that people are willing to recall things, but at that time they were trying to forget everything as quickly as possible. There were a

number of skilled hands. In 1943-44, at a time the city was coming back to life, they had to hurriedly patch up the shell-damaged network and install temporary connections in order to provide Leningrad with power, with lighting. And even later, after the war, the cablemen got their fair share of stick from everyone for a long while. The power supply was insufficient, transformers broke down—they had suffered during the blockade just as houses and people had—substations were in very poor condition, while light was required everywhere, in shops, offices, schools and hotels. The networks became overloaded, cables would rupture one after another. The instruments were far from precise at pinpointing the fault, and everything depended on the expert's intuition, his ability to visualise what was going on underground.

Polyakov, Kosolapov, Polezhayev—each of the foremen had his own work habits, his own points of orientation which could neither be described, nor explained in words. Not one of them was able to help Akimov for the simple reason that none of them had any knowledge of his sector, of the "case history" of that particular cable, its repairs, none of them were aware of the peculiar characteristics of this cable routing, its network intersections. Nor did chief controller Kirsanov, who knew the entire district and who had worked there since the twenties, have any suggestions to make. Kirsanov seemed to use his big pendulous nose, set in a crumpled face, to sniff out the damage. We walked back and forth along the cable routing, yet Kirsanov's eyes continued to look unhappy. Between 100 to 150 metres of cable lay under suspicion. This meant digging it up, cutting into it, testing it, then yet more digging, cutting, testing... All this would have required another two, or three days work.

Both Akimov and Kirsanov were agreed on the fact that the cause of break-down went back to the blockade. A fire was glowing on the road, the cablemen were keeping themselves warm and also heating the stuff with which to fill in the jointing sleeve. It was dark all around—the houses stood black, devoid of illumination. There was no street-lighting, the sole light coming from the headlamps of passing cars. Over the pit hung a lantern with red glass. This cold gloom and the creaking snow stirred something in my memory. For no apparent reason I crossed the street, stood for a while in an archway, then moved along to the next one. Yes, it must have been here. Only then there had been a small house a little to one side, on the waste ground. It had fallen apart before my very eyes. How had it all happened? I must have been driven in here by the bombing. I had been walking along Nevsky Prospekt before that. And still earlier—along the endless Moscow Prospekt. I had been given a lift to the army HQ by a sergeant-major. By Obvodny Canal I heard a slightly hoarse female voice, issuing forth from a black loudspeaker, a very special voice not to have been forgotten from that day on. That was Olga Bergholtz reading her poetry. It was the first time I had heard her. I stood a while by the iron post. The street was deserted, sunny. The corner house, flattened by a bomb, was smouldering, there was a smell of burning. Two women were sitting on a charred girder, at their feet stood a sledge with broken bits of chairs and a gilt picture frame. Later I found myself on Sadovaya Street, at the flat of Galya, an old school friend. Her rooms were full of

snow. From there I had gone to Borya Abramov. The neighbours told me he had died. So then I had taken the food to Vadim's mother... That was how I found myself near Suvorovsky Prospekt. That was how it had been, it was not in the least difficult to reconstruct that day from my memory: it had been the first time I had got leave to come to the city. The blockade had made Leningrad unrecognisable, so everything struck me and was firmly imprinted on my memory.

When the bombing started, or rather when it moved nearer, I took shelter first in one archway, then ran to the next one along the street. The ack-ack guns began barking nearby, the searchlights raked the sky. Everything that on the frontline we had usually witnessed from a distance was now happening overhead. Not far away a bomb exploded, followed by the whine of another one landing—this time nearer still, louder. The sound increased in volume. A woman with a large package in her hands came running into the archway. "Get down!" I shouted, as I pushed her onto the snow and threw myself down by her side onto something soft. There was a blast, a roll of thunder. The house diagonally across the street began to fall apart. The woman screamed with fear. Judging by the explosion the bomb had not been a large one. I was about to get up when I suddenly noticed a man underneath me—the ruddy face of an old man. This was so unexpected that I sprang to my feet. Then I bent down to touch the figure, which was wrapped in a sheet, feeling its face, hair—it took some time to realise that the package contained one of those Father Frosts that people stand under their New-Year Tree. The woman, noticing my frightened expression, began to laugh loudly, hysterically, as if to shake herself free from her own fear. I, too, started laughing. It turned out she was taking this large Father Frost to the big New Year celebration at the House of Pioneers...

"A bomb fell here," I told Akimov.

We checked the blueprint. There was no indicating mark against that house.

"It was at the end of December," I said.

Towards the end of December Akimov had lain ill in bed. He had remained in bed until the middle of January, and there had been no marks on his map for that period of time.

The bomb had landed on the other side of the street, to the left of the archway. Shell fragments had gone right through a section of the iron gates. I remembered that clearly. That instant had imprinted itself on my mind with photographic precision of detail. Probably because of the Father Frost episode. The break-down had helped to extract it from the depths of my memory, where it had been stored away together with many other details relating to that same day of the blockade. Mundane events can become eroded in one's memory: had I made frequent visits to the city, none of this would ever have sprung to mind.

Akimov and I checked and found that there was still a jagged hole left by those shell fragments in the gate. We then started digging and continued to work until morning. It turned out I was right. The cable had been ripped apart at the section closest to the centre of the explosion. A tiny crack must have appeared in the lead at the time, which had

permitted moisture to seep through. It had taken six years to make its impact. This is how long it sometimes took for a blockade bomb to reach its target.

Whilst we were digging and carrying out repairs, I remembered how I had escorted the woman and her Father Frost as far as Tavrishesky Palace. I had carried the doll in an upright position, and passersby would stop and stare in amazement at his ruddy face and his coat spangled with fairy glitter. Some of them even managed a feeble smile. So it had been a pleasant experience to carry him. From time to time I recalled my own fright and laughed.

That incident had to a degree mollified the painful impression the city had made on me during my visit. When I had described my trip in the battalion, everyone had also been astonished at the Father Frost incident and had been cheered by the whole thing. "Father Frost!" they had all exclaimed with emphasis. They had upbraided me for not going in to see the Young Pioneers and their New Year celebration, consequently not being able to describe the children's happiness and how their party had turned out. And they were so eager to know what it had all looked like! Yet I had remembered Olga Bergholtz's poems. I had a good memory then and found it easy to remember poetry. So I memorised them, and recited them by heart in the battalion.

Of course I was sorry I had missed the party. I especially regret it now. But it's too late to alter anything in that distant evening of the blockade, and everything I then failed to see and discern is lost to me forever. But the experience had nevertheless proved useful, if only in helping to repair the break-down on Ligovskaya Street in 1947.

At the end of December, to be more precise on the 25th, an increase of rations was to be announced: workers to receive 100 g of bread extra; office workers, dependants and children an additional 75 g, which would mean 200 g a day instead of 125!

At the beginning of January construction of the road, which was to permit the lorries to go from the railway station direct onto Ladoga without the necessity for re-loading, was to be completed. And at the beginning of March the first trams were to start running. The tram lines having been cleared, the supply of power restored, the first red coaches began to clatter their way down the tracks. People would stand watching and shouting in jubilation.

Cranberries were to be included on rations.

Soup was to be distributed in canteens without the surrender of coupons.

A short time later every citizen was to receive an extra 150 g of fats.

Throughout January a vast amount of work was being carried out to improve the ice road across the Ladoga.

Yet in January things were not going too well. Everything was running behind schedule. Many of the lorries broke down. Repair work was slow because there was a shortage of spare parts.

The proposed plan was to evacuate 100,000 people from Leningrad in February, and 200,000 more in March. This was against the reality of only

11,000 people having been evacuated throughout January.

But in Yura Ryabinkin's diary it is still December. If only he could stick it out till the end of the year, then to somehow hold on till February, till March! But to him one day is a month now, each week a year...

THE LAST PAGES

"9th December (continued). How many more new pages are there left in the diary? One, two, three... Thirty six... And to start with there were ... there were two hundred. In fifteen days' time this diary will be six months old, and so will the war. I've written quite a fair bit. At first my entries were mostly descriptive, but with time they acquired a somewhat lyrical nature. Each day I live through uses up another page, sometimes two. And how many times did the entries begin with the subject of hunger, hunger and cold? Now, as I hold on to my belief in a prospective evacuation, I somehow tone down those thoughts. Yet if that hope were to disappear... What then? What would there be then to keep me going? And now the artillery is firing again, or maybe it's another air alarm. Something, somewhere is banging away, I can hear it. Mum's at the Palace of Labour. Over there, where the artillery fire is... She has to put seals on the property of the regional committee, and on that of the fund. Will the question of our evacuation by plane be resolved today?

"Time to stop now. I've already managed to muck up a whole page with my 'lyrical' digressions. I'd better return to reality. What are we likely to get to eat today? It won't be too bad if we can get something in the canteen on coupons for the second 10-day period. Otherwise we'll have to go without food for the entire day. A whole day without food... Twenty four hours...

"10th December. The end of the first ten days of the month. Yet as far as our evacuation ... the question still remains open. What torment! You know that with each passing day your energy is seeping away, that each day leaves you ever more exhausted by hunger. Dying from starvation is a long and laborious process but the closer you come to death, the quicker the process becomes... Yesterday in the queue at the canteen a woman was saying that five people from our house have already died of hunger... And planes with evacuees are flying to Vologda. On arrival everyone gets as much as 800 grammes of bread and then more if you like so long as you pay the going price. Also butter, soup, porridge, entire meals... Meals consisting not of liquids, but of solid substances such as porridge, bread, potatoes, vegetables... What a contrast to what we have in Leningrad! Oh, if only I could get away from these monstrous clutches of death, escape from this never-ending fear for my life and start a new peaceful life in some small village surrounded by nature ... so as to forget the anguish I've lived through... There it is, my dream for today.

" 'Seek and you shall find, knock and the door shall open! ' But when

Lebedev-Kumach was composing the words of this song, he could never have thought... They're true, these pieces of folk wisdom—'A man is steeled in his misfortune', 'A man's character is fully disclosed only in misfortune'. That's just the way it is with me. Misfortune has not made me any more resilient, but has only weakened me, has brought out the selfish essence of my character. But I don't feel at present capable of rebuilding my character. I know it only needs the initial effort! What I should do tomorrow, if everything goes the way it did this morning, is to bring all the spicy cakes home, all of them! But I'm afraid I won't be able to control myself and will eat at least part of one, even if it's only a quarter. That's where my selfishness comes out. But this time I will try to bring them all back. All of them! The entire lot!!! Yes, the entire lot!!! Then, even if I have to die a hungry death, become swollen, get dropsy, I will at least have the consolation that I had acted honestly, that I have willpower. Tomorrow I must exercise my will. I won't take a single piece of anything that I buy! Not a single piece! If we're not evacuated—and I still nurture the hope that we will—I will have to be able to sustain Mother and Ira. Then the only thing I can do is to go and work as a hospital orderly. However, I have another plan. Mother will get the job of a librarian in some newly-organised hospital, and I'll be her assistant. Ira will be with us."

Yura is rapidly turning his diary into a medium through which, by any means he can, he tries to check himself from going downhill, a process that has already begun! He tries to keep a grip on himself by putting himself to shame! Yura has no other means of combatting hunger, of struggling against that which according to many was what "governed the world". And in order to arm himself, he exaggerates his own guilt. Not content with that, he makes a point of recording in his diary everything that is likely to put him to shame even after his death. Mother (or someone else) will end up reading it, since death, standing right beside him, would release the diary into her hands. Yura uses the very thought of death to pull himself together, to summon his willpower. With hunger driving him into a corner, Yura surrenders one foothold after another. And the diary—his last resort!—becomes more candid and still more horrifying. This is what you are doing, this is what Mother and other people will read, and will find out about you... His affection for his mother also grows in comparison with his love for her in peacetime. His conscience prevails over his suffering, opens up his heart, makes him more responsive.

"This evening will only bring me sorrow. It can't be otherwise. Mum is hungry, freezing. We haven't much firewood, hardly any, in fact, and she won't be able to get anything warm to wear, nor anything edible. She'll be exhausted, nerve-strung... The answer from the Smolny will be negative, or the question will still remain open. She won't manage to get any oilcake. This morning before she went out Ira had cried—a bad

sign; could it be that I, too, am growing superstitious? It looks like it. What gloomy thoughts keep entering my head! The world has become dismal and dreary, hunger everywhere, cold. All my thoughts are concentrated on the sole topic of food, and on warmth. It's freezing outside—20-25° below zero. Although we heated the stove, it is so cold in the room that my feet are like ice and I'm shivering all over. Yet given the chance of a loaf of bread to eat ... I would come back to life, I would laugh and sing songs, I...Ah! What's the use imagining things...

"The clock says its 11 a.m. And the day stretches ahead, followed by evening, and then night. And after that ... another day, another 125 g of bread. Then a new 10-day period will start. Sweets... Slowly my life will drain away, just as slowly as I now turn the pages of this diary... Slowly but surely!

"I've been in such low spirits today and yesterday. Today I partly broke my promise—took half a sweet, as well as 40 g out of the 200 g of dried apricots I bought. But then I didn't make any promises about the apricots, though that half a sweet... I swallowed it and felt such anguish that I would have gladly spat it out but then you can't. I also ate a tiny bit of chocolate... What kind of a person am I? Last night Mum's leg swelled up dreadfully. The question of evacuation is still left hanging in the air; Mother can't be registered with the No. 16 building trust, so our only hope now is the Smolny. The authorities there now have the power to decide whether the three of us live or die. After today we only have 200-300 grammes of cereal to last us till the end of the 10-day period, and also 300 grammes of meat. All of 650 grammes of sweets; but we've still 200 grammes of sugar to get for Ira's card. Mum's coupons for the next 10 days are already half-used, we've only got Ira's (150 g) and mine (180 g) still in reserve... To all intents and purposes we seem to be preparing for evacuation, packing things, getting ourselves ready...

"I am no longer cheered by our recent offensive on all fronts. Tikhvin and Yelets have been recovered, the Germans are fleeing towards Mariupol and Taganrog on the Rostov Front. On the Moscow Front our troops are driving the Germans from the areas they had previously occupied. Hundreds of German planes are out of action due to lack of deicers, which is why they aren't bombing Leningrad for the moment. Partisan warfare is being stepped up in Yugoslavia, the nazis are suffering large losses in Libya at the hands of the British. Only Japan continues to thrash the USA, dealing it extremely effective blows, but it will get its just deserts, same as the Germans will receive from us. Oh, if we could get the permission to leave on a flight out! Only someone who has undergone great suffering, great anguish can experience to the full the happiness that exists in the world. In two weeks' time it will be New Year. Where will we be then, what will have become of us? On this New Year's night the tree decorations will lie abandoned under the sofa, there will be no New Year tree, nowhere for them to show off their glitter and splendour. New Year celebrations will be far from anyone's mind on that night in Leningrad. Like a dream we will remember, if we're still alive, the previous New Year festivities: fir trees decorated with burning candles, the lavish suppers we always used to have for New Year's Eve, suppers with various

dainties, spices, sweets and other delicious things... Perhaps... But then what's the use trying to foresee what may happen to you? How will Tina be spending that night? Where will her thoughts be precisely on the first stroke of midnight, on December 31, 1941, when the last page of the old calendar will be torn off and a new clean page of the 1942 calendar will be revealed? How time flies..."

Yura did not fully realise the significance that Tikhvin held for Leningrad. The liberation of Tikhvin considerably shortened the journey time necessary for the transportation of food supplies to the Ladoga, Tikhvin itself becoming a major transshipment point.

But the Ladoga route was still incapable of fulfilling its schedule, due to a shortage of spare parts. The number of lorries in use had decreased—some were damaged by bombs, others sunk into the lake, yet others stood awaiting repairs. There were too few maintenance workers. The bridges destroyed along the railway line from Tikhvin to Voibokolovo required rebuilding.

"Mum has now gone to see Turanosova in the No. 2 trust to find out about the evacuation and inquire about the felt boots she had promised us.

"Anfisa Nikolayevna walks about looking gloomy and infuriated. Which is understandable. Her stocks of rusks and cereals have run out, the day after tomorrow will be the last time she gets milk at the TB clinic, and the question of her evacuation also remains open. That is why she's in a frenzy, scared out of her wits she won't have enough to eat. But then, it's evil to gloat over someone else's misfortune, let's hope a time comes when not a single human being in the world will know the meaning of hunger.

"The pages of my diary are running out. It seems that the diary itself is determining the time span over which I should write it...

"12th December. Mother has now gone to the ration card distribution bureau. My entire future depends upon this. If it so happens that the incident with the card comes to light, I may even end up killing myself. I fear that will most likely be the case. Otherwise, for someone such as me, someone brought up in a carefree, happy environment, it would mean a life of endless torment, until starvation or a German bullet put an end to my pitiful existence. What will then happen to Ira, to Mother... The possibility of leaving Leningrad, leaving by plane, that's if the reply from the Smolny is positive, will only come at the earliest in January. Yet it only takes a week to swell up and die of dropsy, and but a single instant to get killed by a stray shell fragment or poisoned by gas, which the Germans are sure to use sooner or later.

"But I should appear outwardly calm. Otherwise it would mean the end. None of this is for my sake (my life will end, quite possibly in ... well, I can't name the exact time—it might end any moment now), so it's all for Mum and Ira. Tina will shed a few tears in her faraway town, remembering our previous life, regretting a few things, and then in six

months' time all will be back to normal with her... Then, in another six months, or possibly a year, the war will end, and Leningrad's former happy existence will be restored. Our bodies will decay, our bones turn to dust, yet Leningrad will stand eternally on the banks of the Neva, proud and invincible.

"To think of all the people dying in Leningrad every day! All those deaths from hunger! It is only now that I can fully comprehend the reality of a city under siege. Starvation brings death to every living thing. Only those who have suffered from famine can understand the true meaning of extreme hunger. That is quite impossible for someone who has not experienced it himself.

"But why such dismal thoughts, why this melancholy? All it takes is an occasional reminder of Derzhavin's ode 'On the death of Prince Meshchersky' to start my contemplations of the end. But having been endowed with the gift of life, this priceless gift of nature, why should one think of the evil in it? One must think of the good things and take from life all the pleasures it has to give. There is nothing to lose...

"That's all very well, but there's something inside me that is secretly gnawing away at my soul. Human beings are never satisfied with what they have. They always crave for at least a tiny improvement in their lot, hope that the future will bring them something new. It's quite true to say that 'young people live by hope'. We would have to make only one slight alteration—this is equally true of all people, not just the young.

"It's after two in the morning. Ira is asleep, I am writing my diary."

It is strange that Yura recalls the verse which perhaps more powerfully than any other in Russian poetry reveals the philosophy of death:

*Hardly have I glimpsed this world
And death is ready, baring teeth.
Like lightning's flash the scythe will strike
To cut my days like ripened corn.
Life is but heaven's fleeting gift,
Do what you will with it in peace,
Then with a clear, untroubled heart
You'll blessings give for fate's each blow.*

Yura would have liked to have a similar attitude to life and death. But this is difficult enough for an adult, and even more so for an adolescent.

Yura Ryabinkin was now approaching the most grievous ordeal he will have to go through before the end. His young mind had become the arena of a desperate struggle between conscience and hunger. It's an easy word to say—struggle. But you have to imagine it in all its reality. Duty, love for his mother and sister, shame, the decency and honesty he had been brought up to cherish—all these, of course, stood out against hunger. But hunger grew day by day, impervious to sentiments, and no matter what bans Yura might impose upon himself, hunger did not respect them. It forced him to take and stuff into his mouth little chunks of bread he was

supposed to bring to his mother and Ira. Yura could do nothing with himself. He suffered, writhed with shame and disgust for himself, swore vows to himself, then once again succumbed and broke his vows. He was falling, sinking, but would not give in. He continued to scourge himself, to keep watch on himself... This desperate and almost entirely hopeless struggle, but one which Yura waged to the end, was the most sacred thing in his short life.

"12th December (continued). Mum's not at home. In half an hour, or maybe a little earlier, I have to go to the trust canteen. It's already 12th December. Incidentally, today, it seems, is the fourth anniversary of the election of the USSR Supreme Soviet. Today I declare outright that we shall not hold out in Leningrad for more than another month. It's as simple as two plus two equals four. Just now there was a knock at the door. My heart leaped to my throat. I raced over and opened the door... It wasn't Mum but Anfisa Nikolayevna...

"It's 5 p.m., and Mum still isn't home. It means something bad's happened. Or things have come up in connection with the card. Perhaps they have even arrested Mum at the bureau. Or else she's had some accident. She may already be in hospital or even in the morgue... What tricks doesn't fate play!

"And all of it on account of that ration card. Why did Mum take the card in the first place? It was because of me, because of my hungry appearance. It was I who pushed her into crime. I'm guilty of the future beggarly life of Mum and Ira, or maybe even their death, of Tina's sorrow, not to mention the harm I've done to myself. I'm guilty of all that! If I hadn't given way to melancholy, hadn't been so depressed, none of this would have followed. It is under my influence that Mum broke the law, and I must take the punishment upon myself. If that can't be done, if I've ruined us all, I'll take my own life, I must and I can do it. I'll join the People's Volunteers, and at least do something good at the front, dying for my country. Dying thus I'll pay my debt. 'After the feast comes the reckoning.' 'As ye sow, so shall ye reap.'

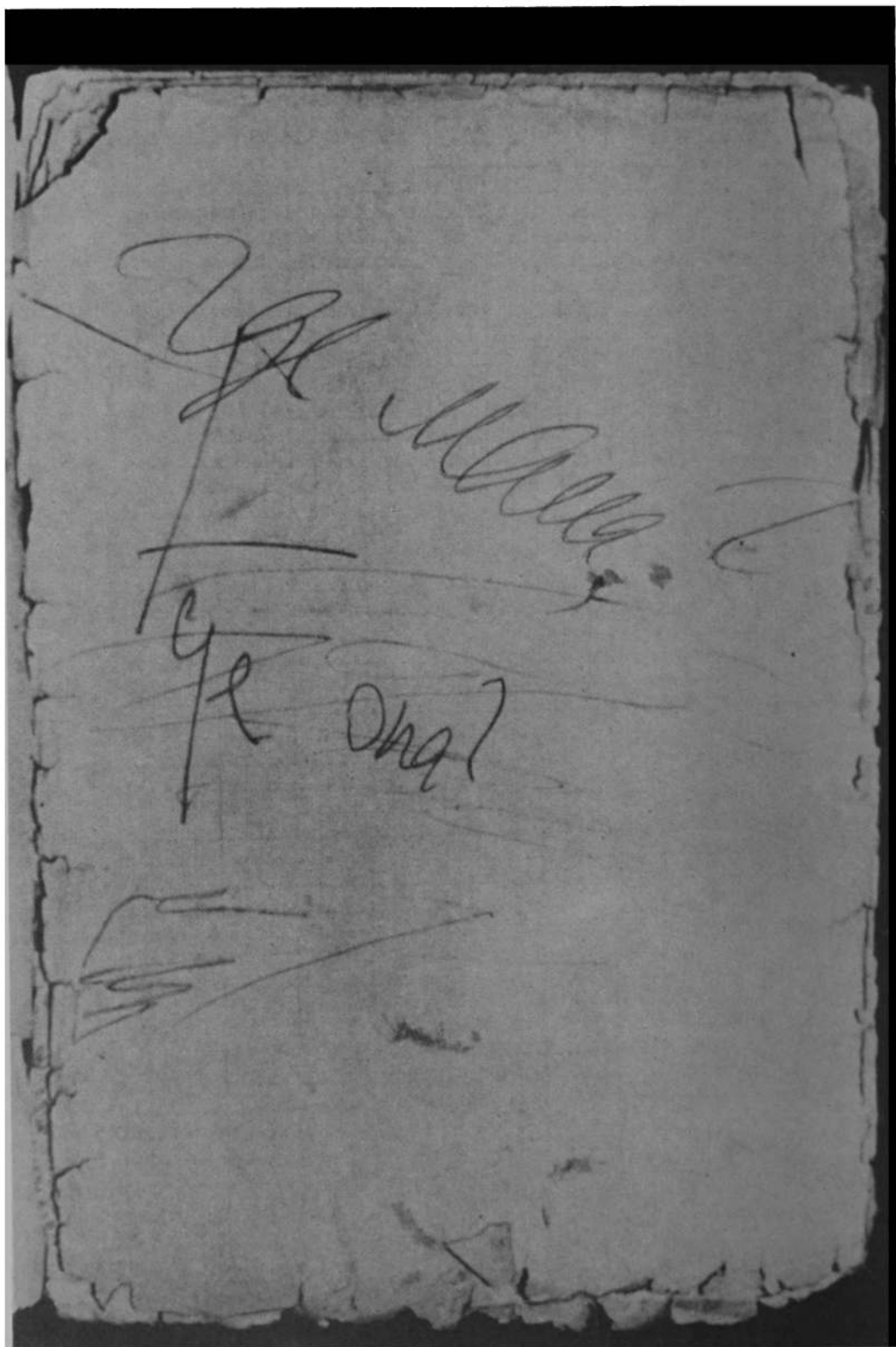
"If that business with the card has been brought to light, I'll send Tina the following urgent telegram: 'At death's door. No help needed. Forget about us. Yura.' I could have written that if I had nobody but myself to consider. But there's Ira. And anyway, there are more ways than one of ruining their lives. Dying is not all that difficult a thing to do, but quite another to try and put Ira on the right track. Writing this almost makes me cry. Yesterday Mother said: 'I put all my faith in God now. Imagine me, a Communist, taking to religion. And Ira believes too.' As people say, one can rely on God, but not for everything. All the same I can sense myself getting religious too—looking at icons and praying to God to deliver us from this horror.

"Mother's still not back... It's already past five, such a long time since she went out... And there was an artillery attack somewhere today...

"The only person to whose heart we are dear, who would not desert us at times of misfortune—Tina—is far far away, in Kansk, in the Krasnoyarsk

дний ребенок! Грешит и губит не мамаша. Вера
на говорит: "у меня всё надежда, кажется не она
я и кем-нибудь, а в том верую. И вот горе." Но,
но она надеется, и сам не помнит. "И, всё-таки, я
убеждена, что, пожалуй, в том сбалансированном решении
на икону и мамаша, тогда, чтобы он от
нас это неслася
и мамаша не и не... Искра, ведь, уже так вера
она ушла в 11 утра, в 12 час дня, я видел, проводил,
не ушла и вот до сих пор небу... А сегодня
как же и арбузы где-то...
единственный человек, которому мне дороги, ко-
торый не покинул бы нас в минуту неслася, Жана
неко-далеко, в Канке, в красноярском крае, за
локадой, в Фрунзе, в Иркутске, в Омске, в Сибири
и ушла с собой...
Сейчас надо... когда и не так, а заблудился в пути
и не... Я должен знать, где мама. А, если
там после в разлуке видели, придется завтра
водить справку по бабинецкой, Олесье с мамой

Вот за устал и пишу
и не могу
спать
О том же
О том же



From Yura's diary: "Where's mother? Where is she?"

14 декабря

уже 2 дня, что редко со мной happens случается, и
я пишу, провалясь в постели, вчерашний снегопад в шта-
те. В кухне 6 пирок какао с сахаром и соевым маслом
(какао - 100г) да еще 300г сыра по 19/10. Кх. По-
не делай сыр, а не сахар, как это в бернских до-
машних рецептах, давай 250г какао да сыр. Вста-
ла сестра с мамой и братом. Мама, вернувшись из района,
сказала, что мы должны в список эвакуированных не
включаться в Колонну марширующую, чтобы по окончании из-
вестия о райсобрании пойдут в 15-20 декабря. Завтра еще,
как-нибудь решим вопрос о самодельном. Дома свои не
адаптировать, кроме 100г хлеба, которые мама вымешивает не погу-
лять, а только бабку. Батю, зуб, сейчас незаметно, о
не дешифрация как-то не верится, все же держишь ее
не держишь на ногах, так что, неспешно все время
и хорошие новости с фронта (разрешение немецкой
под Москвой, освобождение Тихвин), надежда, что
если бы только эти-нибудь подкрепления, что-нибудь
еще!! Как бы это...

5 декабря

амбив, противный много здесь день прибли-
жается к самоубийству. Действительно, выхода
нет. Пытаться я не могу дальше продолжать, как
только голод. Сбавивший голод. Близко замалчивало все
об эвакуации. Странность, только тогда, тогда, не знала
чего, тогда, больше, больше свою жизнь в голоде и заморозке
(мороз по 25-30° пробыл в 10 минут и валился)
не могу... Завтра мама с братом. Я не могу отбывать
их последний кусок хлеба. Не могу, ибо знаю, что за-
кое сейчас даже хлебная крошка. Но я вижу, что они
дальше со мной, и я, в сущности, пишу у них из-за хлеба
что-нибудь официально последнее. Я до того они до-
жны, если мама вчера со слезами на глазах говорила
мне, что она не сможет больше для нас подарить что-
нибудь и не с братом добейся хлеба в 10-15 грам-
м какой странности голод! Я же знаю, знаю, что вот пред-
ти мне крошечку шерстяной, шерсть от которой
приходит без мучений, боли, а ведь и при этом бы
хочу, тогда, но так, тогда я не могу,
но я хочу тогда. (Так что же)

area, beyond the blockade, the front, beyond the Urals, the Yenisei River, way in the backwoods of Siberia...

"I'll wait another 30 minutes or an hour before I set off for trust No. 2. I must know what's happened to Mum. If she's not been seen there since one o'clock, then tomorrow I'll have to start inquiring in the hospitals, and make a round of the morgues."

And in writing sprawled down the rest of the page: "What dreadful things I'm saying, I can't stand any more of this. Oh my God, oh God! "

"13th, 14th December. This entry covers two days, something I haven't often done lately. Spent half the day lying in bed, went to the shop in the evening and got six 100 gramme packets of soya-based sweetened cocoa costing 30 roubles each. I also bought 300 g of cheese at 19 roubles a kilogram. On the way home something awful happened, as a result of which I brought home all the cheese but only 350 g of the cocoa. There was a scene with Mother and Ira. Having returned from the district committee, Mum informed us that we have been put on the list of those to be evacuated by lorry with the People's Commissariat for Construction. The committee and the district Soviet promise that we'll leave between December 15 and 20. There is also the question of flying out which is supposed to be resolved tomorrow. We have no food at home apart from the 100 grammes of bread Mum got in exchange for a packet of tobacco. I've got a toothache and don't feel well generally. I can't quite believe that we'll finally leave Leningrad. All my thoughts dwell on food, I can hardly stand on my feet, so, despite the news about an evacuation and the good news from the front (the defeat of the German forces outside Moscow, Rostov, Tikhvin), I remain downcast and pessimistic. If only I could have a bite of something to eat! How I would come to life...

"15th December. Each day brings me closer and closer to suicide. There is truly no way out. It's a dead end. I can't go on living like this. Hunger. Terrible hunger. Once again, no more news about evacuation. Life is becoming a burden. To live to no purpose, dragging out this life of hunger and cold... It doesn't take long for frosts of 25-30° below zero to make you ice-cold, even to penetrate right through your felt boots. I can't... I'm not alone, there is Mum and Ira, and I just can't take their last piece of bread away from them. I can't, because I know the value of even a crumb of bread now. But I can see them sharing their food with me, and like a bastard I sneak their last morsels from them. And to what limits they themselves have been driven, if yesterday, with tears in her eyes, Mum told me that she really couldn't care less if I choked on the 10-15 grammes of bread I'd pinched from them. That dreadful hunger! I know that if anyone offered me a lethal poison now, which brought painless death in one's sleep, I would swallow it without a moment's hesitation. I want to live, but I cannot live like this! And yet I want to live! So what is the solution?"

And then again across the rest of the page the childishly vulnerable scrawl: "Where's Mother? Where is she?"

"Well, that's it then... I can no longer call myself an honest person, I have lost faith in myself, I have reached the limit. Two days ago I was sent out for some sweets. Not content with buying cocoa instead of sweets (the idea being that as Ira wouldn't eat it, this would increase my share), I also appropriated half of the meagre 600 grammes, which were supposed to last us these ten days. As an excuse I made up a story of how three of the packets of cocoa had been snatched from my hands, backing this up with a scene complete with tears and promising Mother on Pioneer's honour that I had not taken a single of those packets for myself... And afterwards, hardening my heart to Mother's tears and distress at being deprived of her share, I ate the cocoa on the quiet. Today, on the way back from the bakery, I took a 25 gramme piece of bread that I was supposed to bring home and ate that on the sly as well. Just now, in the canteen, I ate a plate of crab soup, rissoles with porridge, and half the jelly the three of us were to share. To make things worse, I ate more of it at home with Mum and Ira.

"I have fallen into the abyss, the abyss of degradation, of complete lack of conscience, of dishonour and shame. I am an unworthy son and brother. I am an egotist, I am someone who, in times of trouble, loses all concern for his nearest and dearest. And while I am behaving in this manner, Mum is doing her utmost for us. Her legs are badly swollen, she's got a weak heart, and yet she puts on her flimsy footwear and goes out into the frost... Without a bite to eat all day, she chases round to all the offices in a desperate attempt to get us out of here. I have lost all hope in evacuation. It has vanished as far as I am concerned. My only interest now is food. And everything in the whole world revolves around attempts to get it.

"I'm finished. My life has come to a close. What lies ahead of me is not life. I desire two things at the moment: that I should die now, and that Mother should find this diary and read it. Let her curse me, a vile, heartless and two-faced beast, let her renounce me—I have fallen too low...

"What next? Won't death come to me? But I would like a quick death, not a slow and wearing one, not the hungry bloody ghost that lurks nearby.

"It's so depressing; I feel such shame and pity when I look at Ira...

"Will I really put an end to it all and kill myself?

"Oh, to have something to eat! Some food!

"24th December. I haven't written anything for a long time. I haven't picked up a pen in eight days and have missed the 16th, 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th, 21st, 22nd, and 23rd.

"I have been undergoing a change. Something good, I think, has crept into my character. It all started after I lost Ira's sugar coupons. Oh, what a horrible thing I did to Mum and Ira then. I was very careless in the shop and lost 200 g of sugar and 100 g of Ira's and Mother's chocolate, plus 150 g of sweets. I want to change, want to reform my character, but I feel that without support from Mum and Ira I won't get very far on my new chosen course of life. If they could just make things a little easier for



*Nina Ryabinkina,
Yura's mother, 1937.*

me. Well, I can't really say much more than that. Today, for the first time in many days, I brought home the entire lot of sweets that I'd got in the canteen. I now share my bread with Ira and Mother, although on occasion I have pinched a crumb or two on the sly. But today Mum and Ira were so good to me, it almost made me cry. They gave me small pieces of their sweets. Mum gave me a quarter of hers (although she did take it back in the end), and Ira a half. They were grateful to me for going to the canteen to get spiced cakes, sweets and oilseed pancakes. And they're the very people that I had deceived so badly before and who now know of my past deception! What a difference a warm attitude can make! But afterwards ... that same mother took one of my spiced cakes, promising me an extra sweet in return (but instead she ate the extra sweet herself), and that same Ira cried that Mother had given us one sweet each and I had to give her a piece of mine. So in the end Ira had more sweets than I did. True, my sin today was to keep one spiced cake for myself. Well ... that was a pretty bad thing to do.

"Mum's getting some sort of promises in the district committee about being evacuated on December 28... She has now gone there to find out more about it; if the evacuation is delayed until January 1 we're done for, because we only have enough coupons to last us two, at most three days—no longer. Mum's state of health is getting even worse. The swelling has reached her hip now. I'm being overrun by lice... Both Ira and I have slightly puffy faces. We polished off the sweets today. Tomorrow it'll be the cereal, the day after—the meat and butter. And then, then..."

Reality is such that Yura often wants to pinch himself, to make sure that this is really him there, that he is not dreaming, that all this is in fact happening to him! Yes, this is him, Yura, and there is no escaping reality. It is his life that is drawing to an end, coming to a close when he is only sixteen, a mere sixteen years of age! Yura veers from trying to avoid and disregard such thoughts and the terrible reality he has to face, to a bitter, desperate head-on confrontation with this reality.

But there's gratitude too. Gratitude for the little he has had time to do, to learn, for the things he has not seen cause to value previously—Yura gives thanks to life, which has so ruthlessly turned its back on him.

It is not difficult to follow his life through from start to finish—it was so short. It is as easy as walking round his flat. And Yura, at the close of his diary, at the end of his agonizing life during the blockade, found the need to do just that—to walk round the flat once more, possibly for the last time—the frightening, freezing, dismal flat, each corner of which reminded him of a different time, an era when life seemed to stretch endlessly before him.

That was Yura Ryabinkin's last New Year.

“Quiet sorrow, weighing one down. Oppressive and painful. Sadness and bleak, excruciating grief. Perhaps something else, too. I only remember the days, the evenings we used to spend here when I come out of the kitchen to go to our rooms. The kitchen still retains some traces of our old prewar life. The political map of Europe on the wall, the shelf with kitchen utensils, a book lying open on the table, the pendulum clock, the warmth from the stove when it is heated—it is as if nothing had changed in these past months... But what I wanted to do was to go round the whole flat again. Before venturing on such a journey, you put on a padded jacket and a winter hat, fasten your belt, pull on your mittens and it is only then that you open the door into the corridor. It is freezing there. Thick swirls of steam issue from your mouth. The cold penetrates under your collar, and you instinctively hunch your shoulders. There is no one in the corridor. Four chairs are piled one on top of the other, put there by Anfisa Nikolayevna. Boards from a cupboard which has been hewed for firewood are placed against the wall. We used to have three rooms. Now only two of them really belong to us. The one by the kitchen is occupied by I.'s family. There's nothing to be said about them. The *burzhuika* burns merrily in their room, from under the door waft delicious smells, and happiness and a sense of satiety radiate from the faces of its occupiers. Next to that one is an empty room with brown wallpaper. The window is broken, a cold wind blows in from the street. There's a bare oak table by the wall and an empty bookcase stands in a corner. Dust and cobwebs on the walls... What is it? It used to be our dining room, a place for enjoyment and rest, for studying and reading. Here there was once (it seems long, long ago) a sofa, a sideboard, chairs, a table with the remains of dinner, a bookcase with books in it. And I would lie there on the sofa, reading *The Three Musketeers*, taking bites at a roll with butter and cheese, or nibbling chocolate. It used to be very

warm in that room and I, 'always content with myself, my dinner and...'. True, I often went without dinner, but then there had been games, books, magazines, chess and the cinema... I felt deprived if I hadn't been to the theatre or had missed something else, and very often had my dinner only late in the evening, preferring volleyball to it and my friends... Finally, to remember the Leningrad Pioneer Palace, its social gatherings, the reading room, the games, the history study circle, the chess club, dessert in the canteen, concerts and dances... That was happiness, something I could never fully appreciate—the happiness of living in the USSR, in peacetime, the happiness of having a mother and an aunt who cared about you, of knowing that no one could deprive you of your future. That was happiness... And the next room, a dismal, gloomy cage, cluttered up with whatever is left of our belongings. There is a chest-of-drawers, two dismantled beds, two desks, one on top of the other, and a sofa, all of them covered in dust, wrapped up and packed, to lie there for a thousand years if need be...

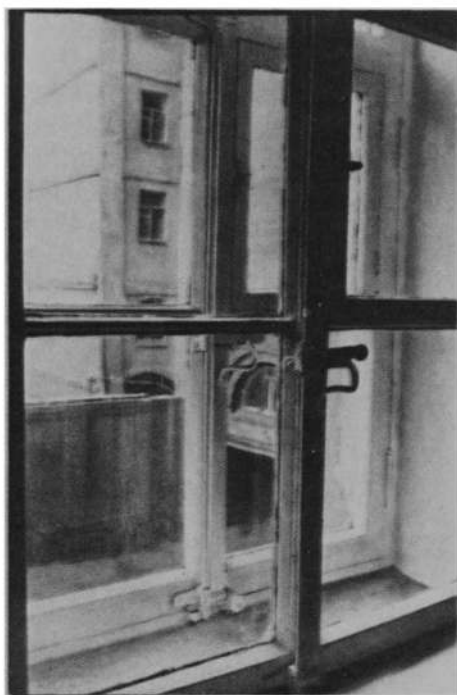
"The cold, the terrible cold drives us from this room, too. But once upon a time there was a small cooking-stove here, on which omelettes were made, sausages fried and soup was cooked. Mum would sit at the table working far into the night by the light of a table lamp. Here, too, we played gramophone records. Jolly laughter would ring out, a huge fir tree, reaching to the ceiling, would be put up and candles lit on it. Tina would come, Misha, too, there would be mounds of sandwiches (with everything you can imagine!), dozens of sweets would be hung on the tree, along with little spicy cakes (no one ate them, for there was so much else!). And now it's empty (that's how it looks to me), cold and dark, and there's nothing to attract me in that room.

"The kitchen is now the place where our domestic life goes on. Here we eat (if there's anything at all to eat), here we warm ourselves up (if there's anything to fuel the stove with), here we sleep (when the lice lay off biting a bit). This is the only habitable corner of the house.

The flat has a deserted look. Life in it has died down altogether. It is as though frozen, turned to an icicle which will melt only in spring..."

After this entry there are only three more pages in Yura Ryabinkin's diary—a thick notebook with a black cover.

"3rd January. This will perhaps be the last entry in my diary. I'm afraid that it ... that I won't get to finish the diary, writing 'The End' on its last page. Someone else will write it, using a different word, 'Death'. And I so passionately want to live, to believe, to feel! But ... there'll be no evacuation till spring, when the trains start running along the Northern railroad, and I won't make it till spring. I'm bloated, every cell of my body contains more water than it needs. So it means that all my internal organs are swollen out of proportion. I can't force myself to move about, can't make myself get up from a chair and walk a step or two. All that's due to a surplus of water and insufficient food. Everything I eat is liquid, liquid, liquid... That's the reason I'm so bloated. Mum and Ira have broken



The view from Yura Ryabinkin's window.

off relations with me. They are sure to leave me. Mum's nerves have already gone to pieces and she's liable to do just about anything... She keeps telling me every day that she and Ira will somehow get out of the city, but I won't. What kind of a worker can anyone make of me? What kind of a student? Even if I do try to work, try to study, after a week's time I'll kick the bucket. Is that how it's going to be? Death, death, looking me right in the eye. And there's nowhere to run from it. To go to the hospital? But I'm crawling with lice... What can I do, oh God! I shall die, and I so want to live, to get away, to live! But perhaps at least Ira will survive. Oh, how sick I am at heart... Mum's now become very rough, sometimes she even hits me, and I hear curses from her at every step. But I'm not angry with her, for I know I'm now leading a parasitical life, being nothing but a burden to both of them. Yes, death's waiting for me. And there's no hope whatever, there's only the fear that I'll cause my own mother and sister to die with me.

"4th January... There's still a whole month to wait before there's any improvement with food and departure arrangements. What will become of us by the end of this month, what wretched beggars we shall be if we're not delivered from this hell by some happy stroke of luck, by the mercy of God. Our Heavenly Saviour, grant us that we be evacuated tomorrow, the day after, before the middle of the second ten-day period of the month... Only precisely that, only God, if there is one, can deliver us. Let him save us now ... never, never, will I have to deceive my mother, never will I be compelled to disgrace my good name, it will once more be sacred to me. Oh, if we could only be blessed with evacuation now! And I swear on my life that I shall give up my vile, deceitful ways and start an honest,

hardworking life in some village. I promise I'll make Mother happy in her old age. It's only faith in God, faith that luck will not desert me and the three of us tomorrow, and hope for an answer from Pashin at the district committee, saying 'you're on the list', that keeps me going. If it weren't for this, I'd die. I want to stay behind, or rather, I would've wanted to, but I can't... Only evacuation tomorrow... When it's all over, I'll repay both Ira and Mum. Lord, save me, evacuate me, save all three of us, Mum, Ira and myself!

"6th January... I can hardly walk or do anything. I have scarcely any strength left. Mum, too, can barely walk—I just can't imagine how she does it. Now she hits me often, scolds me and shouts. She has stormy nervous fits because she can't bear my wretched appearance—that of a weak, hungry and tormented person, who can barely move from one place to another, who is always in the way and 'pretends' to be ill and helpless. But I'm not simulating helplessness. No! It's not pretence, my strength (...) is ebbing, flowing away... But time's dragging on, dragging on endlessly! Oh Lord, what's happening to me!

"And now I, I..."

It's easier for us to read about how sufferings are overcome, rather than about the sufferings themselves. When people win a difficult struggle or die for a worthy cause we feel their suffering was not in vain. But things don't always work out that way. They didn't for Yura. We cannot help him in any way, we can only sympathise with him. And our own helplessness coupled with Yura's inability to find a way out—and we cannot blame him for it—is precisely what makes our compassion for him so strong.

We follow his struggle with his own weaknesses, his victories, while what he needs is someone to take pity on him. Simply to take pity on him. His mother's nerves are strained to the limit, she is on the verge of insanity from constant hunger. Ira is a starved, exhausted child; while the neighbours, the I's, have other things on their plate. Who in the whole world wants him, who can be bothered with him? Yura himself no longer believes that anyone wants such a person as himself—sleepy and sluggish from dropsy, lousy, and with all his "criminal" past (the pieces of bread eaten on the sly, and the spoonful of porridge he had taken from Anfisa Nikolayevna's saucepan—all these things grow in his mind to become offences of unpardonable gravity). And the boy promises everyone, the whole world (even God, 'if he exists'), promises with touching sincerity that he will always be honest, kindly, considerate, will live modestly in some village, and his mother will have a happy, peaceful old age... This is not the cunning of a dying person ready to promise anything in order to save himself. Yura is sincerely tormented by the knowledge that his enfeebled state, his helplessness (and we now know that he really was guiltless in this regard: men slipped into this state earlier than women) might ruin his mother and sister, and was prepared to pay with his own life for their salvation. But is wanting to live such a crime?

Like other youngsters of his age, Yura had never considered that it was necessary for a person to do something before he had the right to lofty dreams, to hopes of a happy, meaningful future, or even more, to life. What could be more natural than such a right? Maybe not everyone is worthy of high hopes and dreams of happiness, but surely every man should have a right to live! But precisely that time had come—death was lurking nearby, death was at his door. Everything was taken from him—warmth, food, even the love of his mother. It now seemed to the boy that she was prepared to sacrifice him for the sake of her daughter, that she was gradually getting used to this frightful thought. If she could still save Ira, then it will be by suppressing her pity for her enfeebled son, bloated with water, who could no longer go out into the street or travel from the city, even if they did receive permission for evacuation... (We repeat—this was how it seemed to Yura, this was how he recorded it in his diary, but what his mother thought and felt in reality, we shall never know).

Who was Yura to turn to for support in his present state? How was he to escape death and break through to where there was life, to where there was some kind of future for him? And not just any kind but one tempered by unthinkable suffering. Yura now knows what his future life—if he is to receive this gift—is going to be like. He sees it as service to others, decency, modesty and kindness. He is ready even now, though he so wants to live! —to sacrifice himself if only not to stand in the way of his mother's and sister's salvation...

To those around him (and to Yura himself) it seemed as though he had simply degenerated, had lost his better self, but, in actual fact, he rose to heights he had never scaled before...

As regards his appeal to God, it was rather an appeal to fate, a prayer to providence, a hope placed on chance and on some very real Pashin at the district committee. Of course, it is not as simple as all that. We admit that in wartime there were such ghastly, desperate minutes when people involuntarily looked for a miracle. At these moments the child cries "Mummy!" but we were grown ups... And we soldiers, true not as yet baptised by fire, we have also appealed to fate, to hope, to providence... That's how it was, there is no getting away from it.

And now the moment has come—the day of evacuation. The few necessities that will be required on the long journey and that can be taken away, have been piled on the sledge. Yura half-rose on his bed, looked around for his stick (has he taken his diary?), tried to stand up, proved unable to and collapsed on the bed...

REMAINING A HUMAN BEING

The blockade represented a confrontation at all levels and in all possible directions: from the General Staff headquarters in Moscow to the small radius of Georgi Knyazev and Yura Ryabinkin.

That nazi officer who gave his visiting bride "a taste of Petersburg", by allowing the curious patriotic Fräulein to fire several bursts of artillery with her shaking hand (a fact recorded by Olga Bergholtz), and Soviet artilleryman Sergei Milyaev, formerly an employee at the Public Library,* were both artillery officers but here the similarity ends. One was fighting for an inhuman cause, while the other was defending man and human culture.

There were people who went to great lengths to find or invent food and vitamins from god knows what substitutes, who secured fuel, who safeguarded the lives of children, and protected cultural and scientific treasures. While their contribution to Leningrad's heroic resistance was perhaps not as visible as that of the guns of Kronshtadt, it was nevertheless resistance, and was of no less importance to the outcome of the struggle on the Northern flank of the endless front.

Sergei Milyaev, of the Saltykov-Schedrin Public Library—"an incorrigible intellectual", became a seasoned artillery officer; V.I. Sharkov, a professor at the Forestry Academy, invented edible yeast and a number of other substitutes which saved the lives of thousands of people; B.I. Shelishch, a rank-and-file technician, was obliged by circumstances (there was no petrol and no electricity) to construct a hydrogen engine from whatever he happened to have available, as a result of which barrage balloons rose above Leningrad.

And our doctors! They had to make many discoveries all over again. It turned out that world medicine knew terribly little about hunger or dystrophy. At times it looked as if mankind was like a child, deliberately hurrying to forget all its unpleasant, annoying, and humiliating experiences, mass starvation being one of them.

Among the letters received in response to the first part of this book, one was from a Leningrader who spoke of how he had landed up in hospital and had astounded the doctor by losing an incredible amount of weight. What he was losing was, in fact, the extra fluid which had accumulated in his body (he was bloated), but some time passed before the doctors realised this. There were also the tragic cases in Kobona, when dystrophic people evacuated across Lake Ladoga stuffed themselves with food and died... At one of the stations through which the evacuees passed, they read a poster saying: "Warm greetings to Leningrad dystrophics!" The people who had written that had obviously forgotten even the meaning of the word "dystrophic". As if there had been no famine in 1921 and 1933!

In his book *The Geography of Hunger* Josué de Castro records that when prisoners were liberated from nazi concentration camps the same astounding forgetfulness was observed in people, even the doctors, with regard to the disease known as dystrophy. They discovered anew, and then not immediately, that the best and the first remedy to give was skimmed milk. And until they realised that, the liberated dystrophic prisoners continued to die, despite all the care and the anguish of the doctors.

* His notes about how he visited his family and his Leningrad flat during the blockade are reproduced in the first part of this book.

"Because of its explosive political and social implications," says de Castro, "the subject until very recently has been one of the taboos of our civilization. It has been our highly vulnerable Achilles' heel, a subject which could not safely be discussed in public..."

"There were several motives for this conspiracy of silence. First, there was the question of morality: the phenomenon of hunger ... is a primitive instinct, and there was something shocking about this to a rationalist culture which tried by all possible means to make reason dominate instinct in human conduct."*

Beleaguered Leningraders had to invent a great many things over again—in the most difficult conditions. Those ordinary people whom Georgi Knyazev called the passive heroic defenders of Leningrad had to cope with, to battle against all manner of things, hungry as they were, amidst the corpses, in pitch darkness...

They also became experts, those unarmed defenders of Leningrad—and not only in things forced upon them through living in a frontline city.

We have written about the attitude of blockade veterans to bread. But their own, special understanding and perception of man—that is worth speaking of, too. People experienced and saw so much, learned so much about themselves and others that almost each and every one of them began thinking about man. They would ponder on human possibilities and limits, and would share with you their opinion on all that. Georgi Knyazev was interested, above all, in man's inner life. To him this was the natural, "professional", if you like, angle of vision. From medical people you would hear about physical possibilities, the limits of the human organism.

But more often than not the ordinary blockade survivor was not concerned so much with physical possibilities as with manifestations of spirit, of man's potential as it had been revealed in those grim days and months.

Lyudmilla Bokshitskaya recalls:

"I endured the blockade's rigours in the fullest possible degree: without reserves of food, without help, but with the faith that it would all be over soon. However, the moment came, that was already in December 1941, when I became totally indifferent to everything: I could not go out for bread and I spent all day long lying in bed. The three of us stayed in bed, my mother, my sister, and myself. We did not react to air raid alarms, did not hear bombers flying over. But as you write: 'Everyone had his saviour...' Our neighbour Nadezhda Kupriyanova came into our room. She had decided that we were dead, since in our apartment, where a lot of people had been living, there seemed to be no one left alive... Seeing that we had already 'taken to our beds', that we were indifferent to our own condition, she went out, saying that she was not going to let the family of such a wonderful woman die. She soon came back, bringing

* Joshué de Castro, *The Geography of Hunger*, Boston, Little, Brown and Co., pp. 4-6.—Ed.



Lyudmilla Bokshitskaya, 1940.

some firewood. She lit the stove and fetched some water. Then, saying that she had been given a rabbit at the military hospital where she worked, she put it in a pot on the stove. While the soup was cooking, she washed us, shielding us from the worst of the cold with a blanket. By that time our corner room on the ground floor was frozen through and through, so that the warmth only extended a metre from the stove. She didn't tell us it was a cat, probably the last one, and not a rabbit, until we had eaten it. That dinner, and our neighbour's care kept us going until the 10th of January 1942.

"On the 8th and 9th we were in bed once again, without any idea of what was happening to us. We lay there with our mother, two daughters, fully clothed, not buying bread, and by now not even talking about it as we had earlier. Mother tossed slightly in her bed, quietly asking something, it seemed in her sleep. Then she asked, louder this time and in a voice that sounded somewhat frightened: 'What's the date today?' And from the fact that we hadn't bought bread for two days, we established that it was January 10, 1942. Then she said suddenly that on this day, which was such a happy one for her, we had no right to die—it was Lyusia's birthday, that is, mine. We must get up today and find ourselves a job clearing snow in the street. She had evidently heard on the radio that workers were required for this... And today I look upon that date as my second birthday, and also my mother's and my sister's. We walked along Skorokhodov Street, where there was an employment centre... For a start we made three paces at a time, and then stopped, but after that we increased it to ten paces... I remember us counting so that we wouldn't do more, for we were afraid we wouldn't be able to manage it, and when we stopped we watched out to make sure we didn't freeze..."

When you hear the stories told by some of the blockade survivors it sometimes seems as if all of them have been reading a lot of Dostoyevsky. Here is the "abyss", here is the "heaven" of the human spirit—all at once.

It is not, of course, from books that they had drawn this knowledge of human limits, this understanding of man, his upward flights and his falls. It is a knowledge and an understanding which in no way gladdens the heart of the blockade veteran. It was bought at too high a price, is linked with too bitter memories. It was this kind of omniscience that tortured Dostoyevsky, but at least to him, as a writer, it was essential...

Those who went through the blockade are not always in agreement with literary classics that to us are great and incontrovertible. After living under shelling and bombing for nearly three years, Ksenia Polzikova-Rubets, a teacher, argues in her diary with Lev Tolstoy about human psychology.

"I walk to the Novaya Derevnja station. I travel to the polyclinic every other day... And the idea never enters my head that perhaps I shall not reach my destination. That's not bravery, but habit. Lev Tolstoy is not right when he says: 'Some time before, Rostov froze with horror when he had to go into the fire, but now he experienced not a shadow of fear. It was not because he had ceased to be afraid, that he had grown accustomed to it (one cannot become accustomed to danger), but because he had learnt to govern his spirit in the face of danger...' It is precisely what we have done—we have grown accustomed to danger. We lie down to sleep to the wail of sirens, the howl of ack-ack guns, the sounds of gunfire, and we drop off to sleep effortlessly, from sheer physical exhaustion. We fall asleep out of the habit of going to bed at that time, and we are awakened only by the intensity of the noise. In our minds we know that we are in danger but the feeling of fear is not there."

In any other case we would undertake to uphold Tolstoy's absolute authority. But here we keep silent. A blockade veteran is at times likely to know things about himself that it would be better for a human being not to know. Things about himself and others that torture him like shell fragments in the body.

Those shell fragments are in his memory.

But the majority of the blockade veterans who have experienced so much preserved a deep faith in man, in mankind. In their memories they retain the entire truth of circumstances that were at times stronger than the individual. So it is rare that someone who has been in the blockade will speak with contempt, rather than pity, of those who experienced moral defeat. He will find pity even for a person who snatched his piece of bread at the baker's. The pangs of hunger were too cruel, and not everyone had strength enough to endure them. Women make particular allowances for the male part of the population, who were the first to die.

"True, sometimes people would snatch your bread in the shop (I had that happen to me), but after all they were crazy with hunger," writes *Yekaterina Vouchar*. "Neither then, nor now, can I find it in my heart to condemn them. I, too, wanted to take someone's bread once, when my family was dying and there was no way I could get bread for the next two days. I saw a very small woman in the baker's with a whole loaf of bread, and I started to follow her, to seek a convenient moment, but then I came to my senses and was horrified at what I'd been contemplating. Evidently I was not yet absolutely crazy..."

Yes, some blockade survivors speak in this way not only of others, but of themselves, and in a very frank manner. The memory tortures them. It is not the kind of knowledge that pleases one, not a revelation one might want to boast about. But people tell their stories: their backward glance from the vantage point of the present, at their yesterday's selves, their actions and emotions of yesterday, is expressed in pain, sad surprise and bewilderment. Surely I couldn't have thought and felt like that! A father goes out and is gone a long time—they begin to worry about him, are alarmed, and finally the mother sends her daughter to follow the route he would have taken, to search for him. The daughter does not find him, and now they are filled with regret about the lost ration card, which someone might take. And when the mother sends the girl to look for him, she says: "Bring him home, and if you can't, get his card."

A man drops in the street and his wife recalls with grief and pain that her first feeling was not one of regret that he might die but fear that she would not be able to drag his dead body away.

People are able to endure a great deal and still remain human beings. This can be seen from the majority of the stories and diaries of blockade survivors. One only has to take into account how difficult it was under the circumstances for the best in man to come to the surface... In families where relations between people before the war were clear and defined, the heights of human conduct were reached more easily, with fewer losses. Here is another Leningrad family, another destiny—that of *Svetlana Tikhomirova*.

"On the 25th of March, 1942 I wanted to make some kind of a present to my mother. I wanted to buy her something on this day, my 14th birthday. There was no cube sugar about, no lump sugar either. The only kind you could get was granulated sugar, but I can't remember how much the ration was at the time. In the mornings, when we drank tea, Mum used to sprinkle some of it into three saucers, for my father, myself, and herself. While no one was looking I would put aside a little of it, sometimes emptying the sugar into my hand, sometimes leaving it in the saucer, or else just putting it into my pocket and later emptying it out somewhere. I had a little antique vase, and I collected all the sugar in that. It took a couple of months, probably—I didn't always succeed in saving some. My father pretended he did not notice anything, and I would

empty out my sugar while Mum went to the *burzhuika* to pour out tea. In those times we always had glue—in a slab like a bar of chocolate—soaking in some plates on the windowsill for several days in a row. And that glue was what we had for breakfast and dinner. So I hid that granulated sugar. When my eye lighted on it I always wanted to dip my finger and try some. One time I even had an urge to get up at night and go barefoot to that vase.

“When the day came, I remember I was so excited my palms were sweating. I wanted to get up before my mother. I put the vase on the table, a whole vaseful of sugar. There was probably a total of 300 grammes in it! Well, of course, there were tears. And immediately the sugar was again divided out between us. That was how I celebrated my birthday.

“And before that I gave my father half a rusk on Red Army day. I can’t recall how I saved that.”

Even today it is instructive to see how those enduring the blockade got to know their own spiritual potential. They also relied on that potential when they had no physical strength, or daily bread. These are not mere words. As you read Georgi Knyazev’s notes you see how all this happened in practice. The most extraordinary thing was that it was indeed possible to substitute spiritual bread for daily bread. Up to a certain point, of course.

“3.1.42. Day 196. I climb the stairs slowly, my heart thumping. I allow myself up to 10 seconds for each step. Finally I’m at our doors on the second floor landing. I give the prearranged signal: three staccato rings. With sinking heart I listen for M.F.’s footsteps. She is at home, waiting for me. She is my heroic woman, staunchly and uncomplainingly withstanding all ordeals, above all, hunger. How thin she’s got! Just as if she were not a fifty-one-year-old woman but a delicate, fragile girl. I kiss her, feel her, my own dear wife and friend. She has not lost her femininity or her exceptional feminine neatness. Her dark eyes shine in her thin face. And I look at her with more emotion, than a love-struck youth at his beloved. What a hero she has shown herself to be! I have known her for 24 years as my wife and friend, but never have I suspected that she had such reserves of spiritual strength, such will to overcome all difficulties. She has not lost her liking for people, or her cheerful disposition and merry tone of voice, or her ability to smile, or the light, glowing in the depth of her dark, enchanting eyes... A glorious Russian woman; or, to be more precise, Russian by culture. By her birth, her nature, her extraordinary uprightness and honesty she is a Komi: both her mother and father were Komi by nationality. This wonderful people, under the pressure of more warlike, savage and barbarous tribes, was pushed back into the taiga and the tundra, almost to the very shores of the endless icy sea. Back in my childhood I read in a geography textbook: ‘The Komi are distinguished by their honesty.’ That turned out to be true. My own,

dearest wife and friend! How happy I am that we're together.

"In the hallway where we now live the lamp is twinkling and the stove burning. We sit down to dinner... It consists of a bowl of water with a little of some kind of cereal in it, and also pellets of black flour, mixed with oil-cake. In addition, each gets two or three 10-15 gramme pieces of slightly toasted bread which at the time of purchase resembled putty. And that's all for today. M.F. dreams of a day when I might, as director of the USSR Academy of Sciences Archives, as deputy chairman of the Commission on the History of the Academy of Sciences, and of the Academic council at its Scientific Archives, be given a ration card of the first category, that is, a worker's card (which is what we are petitioning for), and will thus be equal at least to our cleaning woman—stoker Urmancheyeva.

"Without dwelling on the difficulties of the food situation, M.F. and I talk of how Shakhmatova and her son Alyosha have become quite weak and are dying, and of how some poor wretch who had died of starvation had lain in the yard of the Archives all night long, and someone had already managed to steal his boots, and of how it had not been possible to get hold of some of the items on the December ration card. M.F. is cheered by the fact that at long last the Academy is to have its own food distribution centre... No matter how hard she tries, she just cannot eat any more of the black flour pellets mixed with oil-cake, which we received in December instead of cereal. And I, too, finish it up with difficulty, mainly so that she will not be worried... Our feast comes to an end.

"5.1.42. Day 198. S.A. Shakhmatova-Kaplan and her 16-year-old son Alyosha, the grandson of Academician Shakhmatov, have died from dystrophy and all the ordeals they have had to go through. The boy was extremely gifted and a great lover of astronomy—he would undoubtedly have made a name for himself in his favourite sphere and probably would have become a noted scientist, perhaps even an academician. The news produced a very strong impression on myself and all our staff.

"The father of the dead boy and the husband of S.A., a scientist, was not living with them. Mother and son spent all their free days searching for him, and when they found him, they started bringing him food. They were actually giving him their last crumbs. In the end their strength gave out and both of them lay helpless and doomed.

"6.1.42. Day 199. At the scientific session of the Commission on the History of the Academy of Sciences I made a report on 'The History of the Heads of the Academy's Departments Throughout its Existence (1925-1941)'. The session was chaired by Academician I. Yu. Krachkovsky. Present were A.I. Andreyev, L.B. Modzalevsky, P.M. Stulov, M.V. Krutikova and others.

"That was perhaps my last scientific report."

People who lived through the Leningrad blockade discovered the cruel but lofty truth. The truth about man, about his limits.

"It is hard to believe that all this happened to you," people wrote

to us after the publication of the first part of our book. The blockade survivors themselves find it difficult to believe that they could have endured all this. But the knowledge remains with them for the rest of their lives—yes, Leningraders overcame everything! This surprise at themselves and this knowledge of things overcome are well conveyed in the story told by *Yevdokia Glebova*, whom we have already mentioned in this book. The sister of the talented Soviet artist Pavel Filonov, she recalls how she had saved his paintings:

“In the autumn of 1941, at the end of October, my brother turned up at our place. He brought with him four potatoes, and that at a time when they were literally worth their weight in gold. He had taken them away from Yekaterina Filonova,* from himself, though they had no reserves whatever.

“When Molotov spoke on the radio on 22nd June 1941, announcing the beginning of the war, I rang my brother and asked him to get in some kind of food stocks. He replied with indignation: ‘If people like you and me start hoarding food, that will be a crime.’ Perhaps if he had thought otherwise, he would not have died so early, six months after the declaration of war.

“It was a very cold day, and he was wearing a jacket, a warm hat and Petya’s skiing trousers (his wife must have insisted that he put on those trousers over his own cotton ones, which he wore summer and winter).

“However hard we tried to refuse the potatoes, to persuade him to take them back, he wouldn’t hear of it and finally made us take them. What we said that time, I cannot remember now, unfortunately. Our house was very cold. He didn’t take his outdoor things off, and didn’t stay long. He may have realised it was his last visit to us, but we had no inkling whatsoever that we might be seeing him for the last time. And now I can’t understand how it could’ve happened, I can’t forgive myself that I did not take those potatoes back to him. Having shut the door after he’d left, we went to the window, expecting him to stop, as he usually did, to wave us goodbye and give a smile, but he didn’t... He walked across the courtyard with his big strides, but slowly, his head bent. He had already disappeared under the archway, but we remained standing there by the window, looking at each other in perplexity.

“What was he thinking then, what were his feelings?

“It was his last visit to us.

“After the war started he volunteered as a fire-fighter, extinguishing incendiary bombs which fell on the house he lived in. He was hungry, and how freezing cold he must have been, too, in his jacket, which he could not take off even indoors because it was too cold in the house.

“Once he fell from the stairs in the dark. He did not go to the doctor, putting his faith, as he always did, in his own strength. But he no longer had any strength... I don’t know what happened that time, but usually when he was ill (which was very rarely) he would sit in an armchair and

* His wife, Yekaterina Alexandrovna.



*Evdokia Glebova,
the sister of the painter Pavel Filonov, 1940.*

doze off, but would not go to bed. True enough, even a healthy person would have found that bed of his rather uncomfortable, let alone a sick man (he had no mattress on it). Besides, he did not believe in doctors or medicines.

"On December 3rd 1941 we were told that he was in a very bad way. We hurried over to his place right away. The trams were still running then. When we entered the room, we saw my brother lying on the bed, which was not in its usual place. He was wearing his jacket and his warm hat, and on his left hand was a woollen mitten. His right hand was clenched in a fist and there was no mitten on it. He seemed to be unconscious, his eyes were half-closed and he did not react to anything. His face, which had changed beyond recognition, was calm. At his bedside were his wife and their daughter-in-law, M.N. Serebryakova. It is hard for me to explain why that right fist clutching the mitten made such a deep impression on me—so deep that even today, over thirty years later, I can still see it. If I could draw, I would draw it, and then it might become clear why that hand produced such an impression. It is very difficult to write about it. All the same I shall try. The right hand, clutching the mitten, was turned somewhat to the side and facing upwards. And somehow the mitten didn't look like a mitten... No, I can't convey it. It was the hand of a great artist, a hand that had known no rest in life. But now it was lifeless. My brother's breathing was not audible. In absolute silence, without talking, we waited for the doctor to come and give him some injections. But already before the doctor's arrival we realised that it was all over. He was breathing so lightly and slowly that we did not notice him breathe his last. He slipped quietly from us.

"I don't remember whether we cried or not. It seems to me that we sat there in a kind of stupor, incapable of comprehending that he was no more! It was impossible to believe that all the attributes of his creative life remained—there stood his easel, there lay his palette and his paints, there on the wall hung his pictures and his pendulum clock—whereas he was gone.

"Only the arrival of the writer Nikolai Toshchakov, who lived in the same flat and had dropped in to see how my brother was, brought us out of our strange frozen trance. With Nikolai Toshchakov's help we began to prepare him for his last journey. Nikolai carried him from the bed to the table without our assistance. My brother lay there in his grey suit, the only one he had ever had. But he was so thin, so unlike his former self, that his pupil, the sculptor Suvorov, who had come to pay his last respects and to take a death mask, had to abandon the idea. At that terrible time, when it was impossible to get a coffin, and people were wrapped up in sheets to be buried, we decided we would do everything we possibly could to find wood and order a coffin. We succeeded, with the help of the Artists' Union, but not before a week had passed. So it was on the ninth day after his death that we buried my brother...

"On the day of the funeral we—my sister and I—found and brought with us two sledges, a big one and a children's one, the latter for my brother's widow, as she was too weak to walk behind the coffin. They brought my brother to the cemetery without me, because I was supposed to get a place prepared, a grave for my brother, where his body was to be lowered in a few hours' time. On arrival at the Serafimovsky Cemetery I found a man who for some bread plus a sum of money agreed to get the grave ready. What an extremely difficult job it was! The frost was bitter, the earth, stone-hard. But an even greater obstacle than the frost were the roots of an acacia by which he had to dig. As I remember it, and it is impossible to forget, he spent more time chopping the roots with his axe than he did working with his spade. I felt I just couldn't stand idle any longer and I told him I was going to help. But after five minutes he took the spade from me and said: 'It's beyond your strength.' How afraid I was that he would stop work, or even if he didn't, would start swearing at me! But he only said: 'In this time I could have dug three graves.' I could not add anything to the sum we'd agreed on, as I only had just that much on me, and I told him: 'If you only knew what kind of man you're doing this for!' Then the grave-digger asked me about my brother. I told him all about Filonov's life, how he had worked for others, had taught people without asking anything for his very important work. The man went on digging, but listened very attentively. To this day I can easily see that man in my mind, so much so that if I met him I think I would recognise him. He was not a professional grave-digger, but in order to support his family he had taken on this onerous work. And I'm so grateful to him for what he did, for being so patient and completing this terribly difficult job.

"By the time they brought my brother's body everything was ready.

"Here is how they brought him. My sister Maria, Yekaterina Filonova's daughter-in-law and the latter's niece, Raya, alternately—two pulling the sledge with my brother and the third, the sledge with his widow.

"My brother's body was lowered into the grave in an unusual manner, for half the grave had been hollowed out from below, with the surface left untouched.

"What happened after the grave had been covered with a mound of earth, on which there was not a wreath, not a single flower even, I somehow don't remember. We took Yekaterina Alexandrovna back to her home, and her daughter-in-law and Raya stayed with her. Whether we went in for a while or not I can't recall. It seems to me that we didn't, but left at once to take the sledges back to their owner. But I do remember that when we got home frozen through and through, and wanted to light the stove to warm ourselves up, we saw there was no firewood in the house—during our nine days' absence someone had taken it all.

"After my brother's death Yekaterina Alexandrovna went on living in the same flat. Two doors away, down the corridor, lived her daughter-in-law, the widow of her elder son, and her niece Raya. They both looked after Yekaterina Alexandrovna and helped her as much as they could in those terrible days. My sister and I did not come to see Yekaterina Alexandrovna very often. We were both working, were very tired and, understandably, hungry.

"All my brother's paintings remained with his widow. We could not bring ourselves to suggest to her that it would be better to move them to our house, which was a safer place to keep them since we still had a separate flat then. And as she said nothing about them either they remained with her. The only thing I could do in the circumstances was to take the paintings down from the cupboard where they lay and to number them all in the presence of Yekaterina Alexandrovna.

"When on my return from evacuation I began to compile a catalogue, knowing that there were 400 pictures or so, I put down the numbers 1 to 400 in the exercise book I was using. However, when I began to put in the entries, and I could not do that in sequence as I didn't want to disturb the paintings, but just went through them in order in which they lay, I found that several numbers remained unclaimed...

"It was already five months since my brother's death, when one day someone rang our bell. I opened the door and saw two young girls supporting Yekaterina Alexandrovna by the arms. She was wearing her old fur coat with an embroidered towel tied round the waist, to which an aluminium mug was attached. She could hardly stand. The girls who had brought her explained that they had found her, completely exhausted, on Anichkov Bridge, and had offered to bring her here. I should now explain that she spoke very unclearly since she had had an illness. My brother had managed to restore her speech, but after his death, what with loneliness and hunger, it had once again become difficult for her to speak. Nevertheless, she had managed to explain to these kind girls where she was going and they had delivered her safely. It turned out that she had left home the previous day without saying a word to anyone of her intentions, and where she had spent almost 24 hours remained a mystery she could not explain to us. Yekaterina Alexandrovna stayed with us and I began trying to get her fixed up somewhere.



*A portrait of Evdokia Glebova
made by Pavel Filonov.*

“After my brother’s death on December 3, 1941, and after I had arranged for his widow to go into a home for chronic invalids at the end of April 1942—that was the most I could do for her—my sister and I brought all our brother’s works to where we lived in Nevsky Prospekt.

“By that time we were famished. We could not leave Leningrad, having all our brother’s pictures and manuscripts and being without the strength to put them into storage.

“We were working at a military hospital on Moika Street at the time, where the Herzen Institute of Literature now is. Angela Frantsevna (I never knew her surname), who lived in the same house as we did, got my sister a job there. By doing that, she literally saved us. Soon my sister managed to get me taken on there, too. We received two worker’s ration cards! It was real happiness! But it was already too late... After gaining a little strength we began to feel that even this ration was not enough to keep us going. On top of that, someone stole my sister’s bread coupons—fortunately only those that gave her the right to receive part of the bread at work. She kept this from me so that I would not start sharing my bread with her. My sister was a wonderful woman, who devoted her entire life to her sisters. To me she was a sister, a mother and a friend. The theft of her coupons immediately affected her health, and not knowing the reason, I was at a loss. And what could I have done? The only way out was to get us on the evacuation list. But how could we do that, when we had our brother’s legacy to look after?

“Then suddenly Victor Vasilievich, our niece’s husband, arrived from the front. His family had already been evacuated and he had come to see if we were still alive. When he saw us he immediately asked: ‘Why haven’t

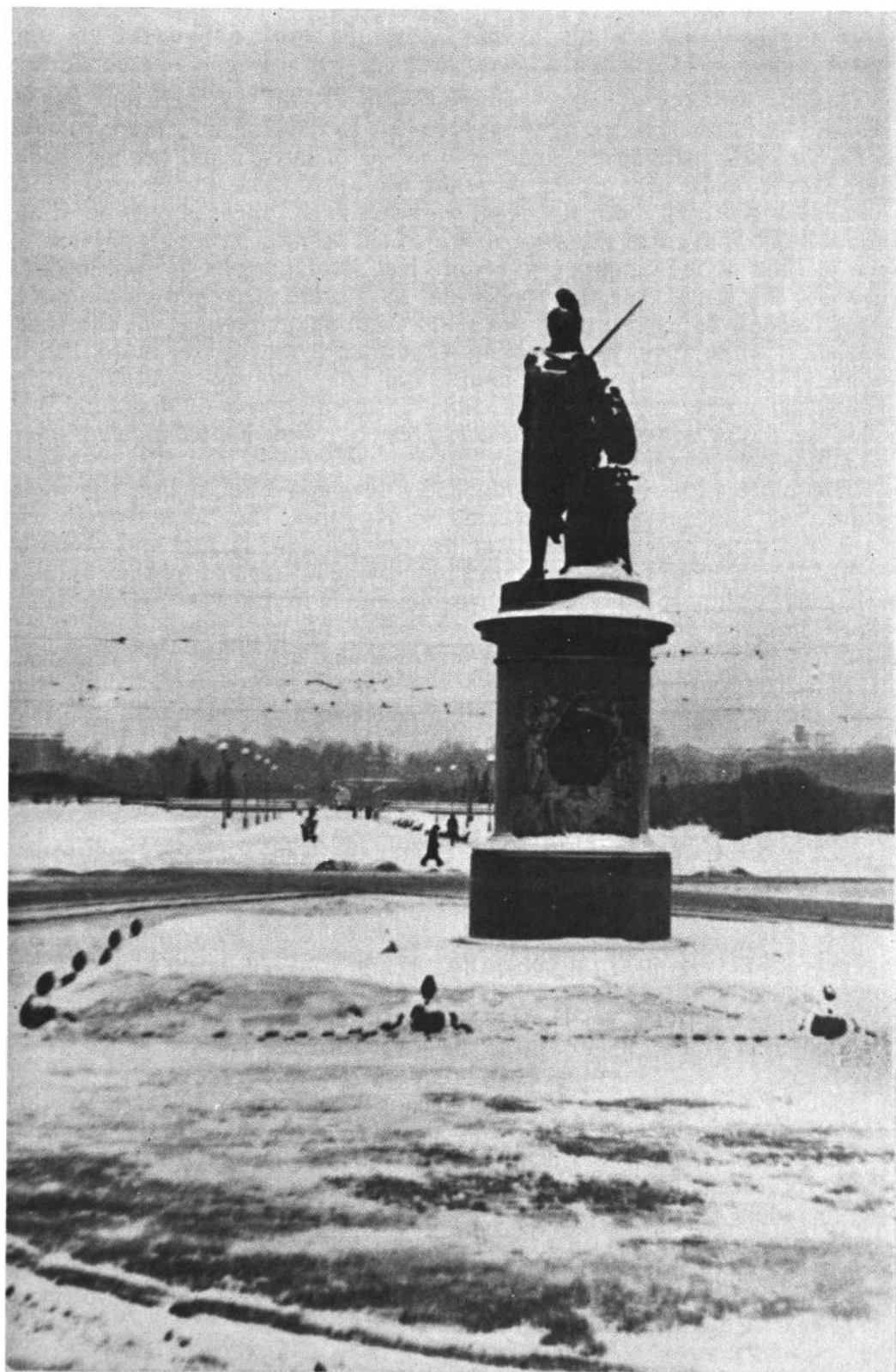
you gone away, why are you still here, in Leningrad?' We told him that we couldn't go, as we had our brother's pictures and manuscripts to look after. When he gathered from our subsequent conversation that our problem was that we hadn't the strength to carry the paintings to the museum, and that there was no one who could help us, he promised to do something for us. He told us he had come from the front on a mission, so we would have to carry out our plan right away.

"Our brother's works, packed up long before, were in the very same room where that unforgettable conversation took place. They were packed in the following manner: one package consisted of 379 paintings and manuscripts while the second had in it a roll of 21 canvases. When we really understood that this could be taken to the museum, what's more, right now, our happiness and delight knew no bounds. Victor Vasilievich picked up and carried the roll, while I carried the package with the 379 works! That was something I did not realise until 25 years later. All that time I had been sure that someone else had carried the package and that I had simply escorted them.

"I found that out in the winter of 1967-68. This is how it happened. All these years I have been gathering up everything about my brother so that all I managed to find would be deposited in the collection of the Central Archives of Works of Literature and Art in Moscow. But before I handed them over I had photographs done of all those manuscripts and then had them put onto microfilm. I asked Victor Vasilievich to write about how it had all happened then, during the blockade. He did so, and gave me what he had written. How astonished I was to read that the second, lighter package was carried by Yevdokia Glebova. I immediately rang him up and cross-questioned him, quite certain that he was mistaken, but apparently I was wrong. Wherever did I find the strength to do it? He wrote: 'The second, lighter package was carried by Yevdokia Glebova.' That package contained 379 works, three of them on stretchers, and also the manuscripts!

"To this day I cannot imagine myself carrying such a weight then. I did not believe him, and questioned him for a long, long time, but everything had been as he described it... Whatever had happened? Could it be that joy over the fact that my brother's work would be saved, would be in the museum, had given me strength, but had robbed me of my memory? There was every reason to be happy, for we could now be evacuated, which was a matter of life and death for us, since my sister's health was getting worse and worse."

The memory of Leningrad preserved in the diaries, and the blockade survivors themselves, told us where they had found the source of their strength. Those who believed and those who could not bring themselves to believe that it could possibly have happened. These people had come to know the value of life and warmth, of bread and human solidarity, all the things man is unable to appreciate properly as long as he has them.



A HISTORIAN'S DUTY

Georgi Knyazev's diary (running into 1,200 typewritten pages) somewhere after the first 300 pages begins to develop into martyrology: a list of those who in his small radius died of hunger and the blockade. But this is only one aspect of what he wrote. The longer and more detailed his entries about the dead, the more joyful those about the living, about the beauty and richness of life which seemed strikingly intense to the victims of the blockade who only had several weeks or even days to live. At the same time the weeks and days were stretched enormously, every second being saturated with the triumphant feeling: all the same I'm alive, we're alive, we're getting something from life, far more than in normal, ordinary times, when people did not value the months and the years, did not attach any significance to them! It was of that time that Olga Bergholtz wrote in her *February Diary*: "...how happy we were then, what heady freedom we breathed."

The more hunger and the blockade devalued human life, the more important and precious it became to Knyazev, the humanist. In the early days and weeks of the war he was not always just and merciful in his diary entries to those around him, being influenced by the complex relations within the academic environment. Now he was making wiser, more humane judgements of those same people, those same facts, distinguishing man's guilt and his misfortune. That is not all-forgiveness; it is understanding. What do yesterday's passions matter, passions that were at times petty and base, if all of us are to be taken in turn into that "first million"? Where will you yourself be—in the first or the second million?

"13 and 14.1.42. Days 206 and 207 of the war. Yesterday and today they have been broadcasting Popkov's speech on the radio: 'All the worst is behind us. Ahead is the liberation of Leningrad and the rescue of Leningraders from a hungry death.' That is how the contents of the speech are passed on from person to person. I myself haven't heard it for our radio set is not working.

"People are living on their last hope... January—well, we may last through it, but February—unless there's a turn for the better we won't survive it. The weakened just keep on dying."

Faithful to his "task"—not to allow the gloom of the blockade to wipe out the memory of the dead (even in his small radius), Georgi Knyazev writes of close and distant acquaintances, of people whose names no one will ever recall. Not one of them was included in the list of the 607 Leningraders who received awards or among those who died a heroic death. He prepared his own name for entry in the martyrology while he was still in a condition to do so. With just the same conscientiousness and objectivity as he showed for everyone else, he recorded the positive and negative qualities of Georgi Knyazev.

"18.1.42. Day 211. As people are dying all around, I have decided to put my affairs and my papers in order, just in case. Today I have completed the classification of all my materials which I first jotted down on paper to be later arranged in files according to the specified order.

"The main significance of my archives lies in the materials I have amassed on the history of the everyday life of the average Russian intellectual during times of wars and revolutions in the first half of the twentieth century. Among them first place must be given to 'The History of My Time', notes and appendices to this, both hand-written and typed out materials...

"19.1.42. Day 212. One after another research workers are dying at the Leningrad Department of the Institute of History. Lavrov, an old university friend of mine, has died. Like myself, he served at the Leningrad Regional Archives, and then came over to work at the Academy of Sciences. At one time he had been head of the History Archives at the Academy's Institute of History in Leningrad. He had done a great deal of work on the latest academic edition of *Russkaya Pravda*, was an exceptionally modest man and somehow poorly fitted for life. He crossed the fatal barrier at the beginning of January. He lay weakened and helpless, with one foot in the grave, until he finally breathed his last.

"Yesterday M.F. admitted feeling tired. She really has grown very thin, and, during the past few days, very pale. Only her dark eyes still burn brightly.

"How much strength we have lost, what borderline have we arrived at, where is that fearful limit of endurance past which man steps never to return? Taking the normal condition as 100 per cent, we drew the fatal line at the point where man retains 50 per cent of vital energy. M.F. thinks she has lost something between 40 and 50 per cent, which means she is in the region of that fatal limit.

"After the loss of 50 per cent, one's strength begins to ebb fast, and after a 60-70 per cent loss come agony and death.

" 'We have to survive somehow,' M.F. insists, 'we must not cross the fatal line.'

"21 and 22.1.42. Day 214 and 215 of the war. It's the second day I haven't been to work because of the frost: my wheel-chair doesn't work, for the oil freezes in it. M.F. can't accompany me there and back, her strength is noticeably failing, only her spirit is still sturdy.

"Could it be that we shall not manage to hold out till spring? All around too many are dying, and not just somewhere or other, but right here in our house and at work. Each of us hears the tread of the last summoner. It is better not to raise my eyes to the ceiling: up there is the hook, so firm and secure, which attracted my notice when I first entered the room about 12 years ago. Even then the ghastly thought flashed through my mind—could it happen that I would use it some day? If anything happened to M.F., yes, I probably would.

"But who knows how fate will have it? No one knows what will happen tomorrow, or even today, right now...

"As I sorted out my papers, my unprinted works, those finished or only just begun, I was happy to find and reread the quotations from some of my favourite authors."



Both Okhapkina and Ryabinkin pinned all their hopes on evacuation, on the Road of Life. So did the majority of Leningraders. Until quite recently evacuation was viewed as a misfortune, but now it was seen as an escape to safety. But the Knyazevs found it very hard to reconcile themselves to the need to leave the city, and for Georgi Knyazev the idea of parting with the Archives was unthinkable, he could not conceive of his life outside its walls.

The Road of Life was functioning thanks to the efforts of troops of the Leningrad Front, the medical personnel, drivers, sailors, maintenance workers, and altogether thousands of people devoted their energy to it. Of the many accounts we had, we quote only the story told by an old Petrograd doctor, *Mikhail Kovalchuk*. When he told us about it he was already 93. He worked from morning to evening in his garden, raising magnificent black and red currants, gooseberries, and flowers, and giving all of it to children and neighbours. He was a remarkably altruistic and hardworking man.

In 1942 the city health authorities sent him to the eastern bank of Lake Ladoga, to Zhikharevo, in order to arrange medical services at the evacuation centre for those citizens who were sent across the lake. Despite increased rations, the death-rate among the evacuees was high.

“So I began to receive and sort out the sick. I saw that many of them would have to remain behind—they would be unable to make it.

“Then I set up an emergency hospital. I put beds wherever I could, and patched and nailed plywood over the holes in the ceilings. What now? I could not give the sick food of the kind being issued for the journey. The stomachs of these people were in a very weakened condition, and that food, to my mind, was a danger to them. The mortality rate among those being taken across the lake was very high. I began asking the city health authorities to grant me permission to perform autopsy of some of the bodies in order to understand what was happening. They agreed, since I had studied at the Military Medical Academy and was taught by Ivan Pavlov and surgeon-in-ordinary Fyodorov. I was their favourite, because I sharpened the knives for the surgeons.

“I opened up several corpses. What did I find? In one of them the stomach had burst and the contents had come out: a piece of hard smoked sausage, a piece of bacon fat and a hunk of bread—the entire dry rations they had been issued. After having dinner he’d eaten these as well! So from that time I started asking, begging that the issue of dry rations be stopped. There was a representative of the Council of People’s Commissars there, Khanin by name. I said to him: ‘Please help, be wise! Mortality is high. We have to get it down somehow. Give me permission not to issue these dry rations.’

“But he wouldn’t do as I asked, because there were people who said: ‘What are you thinking of? The evacuees couldn’t possibly manage without the dry ration. They’ll be going by train, and the road’s been bombed by the Germans, so they may have to wait somewhere en route. How can we feed them, say, for three or four days?’

"Well, of course, I didn't take such stupidity lying down. But no one would listen to me. I tried to prove it to them, even show them the opened up bodies:

" 'Look, it's not only your sausage lying in there: they ate it, string, skin and all. It all ends up in the stomach.'

"I took it upon myself to reduce the nutrition of my patients. In a little while I found that the mortality rate among them was falling. And I didn't respond to all the tears, when the hungry people surrounded me and begged for some more. I ignored their pleas because I knew what the result would be.

"One day the representatives of the State Committee for Defence turned up. They asked me:

" 'What's wrong with you here? People in Leningrad are starving, have no water to wash themselves with, and still they manage to remain alive. But when they arrive at your hospital they die. What's happening?'

"I said nothing. 'You've got such wonderful food!' they went on. 'What could the matter be?'

"I said that this wonderful food was precisely the reason for the deaths. I told them what was going on in people's stomachs. They listened to me, called a little meeting, and asked me to repeat what I had said. I repeated the whole story at that meeting. They agreed with me, confirming that evacuated Leningraders should be treated as sick people. They had to be healed by special nutrition. Who was responsible for that? It was up to the chief doctor to provide medicines and the proper kind of food, which would not make the patients die. There was a doctor here, and he was responsible for their nutrition. Let him treat the patients with medicines and feed them in whatever way he considered proper.

"But here the head of the evacuation centre said: 'But he wants to withdraw their dry rations. Before they get to Tikhvin people might be held up on the train for three days. Then how are they going to be fed?'

"I said:

" 'There are spare locomotives, aren't there? Each one has a boiler. Cook thin soup in the boilers and feed them with it.'

" 'But the train is so packed, it's impossible to get anywhere near it,' they said.

"I replied:

" 'That's an altogether different question. Some of the people could be turned back, but those dry rations are no good for them. Apart from any other considerations, the dry rations never last long enough to get as far as the train: the evacuees gobble them up at once. Incidentally, right outside this building, in which we are holding our meeting, people are at this moment boarding a train. I suggest you send someone to see what they're carrying in their bags: have they still got their dry rations as they're boarding the train to leave? I'm certain that none of them have.'

"Well, they sent someone to check. It turned out that not one of them still had their dry rations. The rations had all been eaten! I then said:

" 'The very lightest food I have is millet. But I need semolina for the young children, for I get children of different ages, even small babies.'

" 'The request is justified, it's a serious, and a very difficult problem,'

they told me. 'But we'll try to get semolina to replace millet.'

"In eight days a wagon-load of semolina arrived.

"They left comrade Andreyev, one of those representatives, to help me. And in fact the following day Andreyev came to me and said: 'Comrade chief, I'm at your disposal!' Besides your authority for shooting anyone for disobedience, I thought, you like to indulge in sarcasm.

" 'Comrade Andreyev, if you're not being sarcastic, let's sit down to talk things over, and if you're being sarcastic, then your help is not required.'

" 'Where does sarcasm come into it?' he asked.

"The first thing I wanted was some kind of premises, where the bodies could be put while awaiting burial—lists had to be made and certificates handed out. And next door was a huge barracks and there was nobody to be going in or out of it. We couldn't tell what was inside but there was a guard standing in front of it. I said:

" 'I don't know what the place is, but I need that barracks.'

"Andreyev asked: 'Where's the chief?'

"We went to see the chief. I was in a sheepskin jacket, and Andreyev in his civilian clothes. The soldier on duty came out. We asked where the chief was, and Andreyev said: 'Ask him to come here for a few words.'

"The soldier disappeared behind the partition:

" 'Comrade chief, the army doctor's here.'

" 'Tell him I can't see him,' we heard the man raise his voice.

"I was worried, wondering what would happen. But Andreyev just said quietly to the soldier on duty: 'Go and ask him again. We won't leave until he's seen us.'

"The soldier went to the chief again and told him: 'They won't go away.'

" 'Didn't you hear what I said?' he replied. 'Take them by the scruff of their necks and throw them out.'

"I was terribly scared on this fool's behalf, thinking he'd really be in for it in a moment. I'd have to beg and entreat ... I was really frightened. After a while the chief came out with his face covered with lather and only half of it shaved.

" 'You heard my orders?'

" 'We did but we're not carrying them out,' Andreyev said.

" 'I'm telling you once more—I shan't receive you!'

" 'On the contrary,' Andreyev said, 'you will receive us. You haven't even asked why we've come here. You think that if someone comes in wearing civilian clothes there's no need to talk to him? And suppose we'd come to report that we'd caught a German spy? Wouldn't that interest you at all?'

"Then Andreyev took his credentials from his pocket and displayed them. You should have seen the chief turn pale with fright and begin apologising. Andreyev said: 'Let's go to that barracks.'

"We went. The guard was at his post. The place was like a big barn. I thought: 'My god, if only they'd give me a chance to arrange the corpses decently!' The chief immediately started to say that military supplies were stored in there.



The entrance into the Academy of Sciences Archives.

“ ‘Open up! ’ Andreyev ordered.

“It was opened. We looked and saw a heap of white stuff—something like lime or chalk, five torn gasmasks, and about two hundred rifle cartridges. Even the chief was embarrassed. Andreyev asked:

“ ‘Why do you call this military supplies? Why does a man have to freeze outside guarding this junk? I’m giving an order—you have three hours to remove all this stuff, to bury it, and to bring the keys to this army doctor.’

“I left. In an hour’s time the keys were brought to me. I went and occupied the whole of that barracks. So that was how I coped with the situation.”

“I’M FEVERISHLY HURRYING TO LIVE”

It was a difficult time for Georgi Knyazev. The postwar time had not been easy either, yet this particular time before and during the war was far worse. Especially for one of his profession—historian. This seems to be an appropriate moment to say a little more about Georgi Knyazev. He graduated from the historical-philological faculty of St Petersburg University in 1913, and went to work at the Archives of the Ministry of the Navy. His special task was to prepare for publication documents of the time of Peter the Great and the Northern War against the Swedes. This

work brought him and Maria Fyodorovna, who was to become his wife, together. After the revolution, too, he was engaged in archival work. He built up two valuable collections in his life. One, in 1917-1926, was the historical department of the Naval Archives, and the other, in 1929-1941, was the Archives of the Academy of Sciences. Nothing remains of the first. In 1927-28 it was little by little cut down as being "non-essential", and eventually completely liquidated. In 1929 Knyazev was appointed to head the Academy of Sciences Archives, where he worked for forty years, devoting all his energies to it, right to his death on 30th June 1969. He gave lectures on the organisation of archives, had a high reputation not only in the Soviet Union but also abroad, and was awarded the Order of Lenin and the Order of the Red Banner of Labour. From boyhood, since the time of the 1905 Revolution, he had been collecting leaflets, appeals and posters, amassing a large and interesting collection. He was inclined towards philosophical thought. Of his own inclinations, his cherished vocation, he himself wrote best of all with the painful frankness of a confession.

Maria Knyazeva recalls the days of the blockade:

"Georgi found it very difficult at that time to write his diary. He usually did it in the evening, although there was hardly any light. The home-made lamp with a thin thread of a wick, filled with goodness knows what, grudgingly illuminated a small area of the writing desk. But he considered it his duty to write the diary... Every day he visited the Academy's Archives. He travelled there in his wheel-chair. He often had punctures in its tyres, and then it became almost impossible to travel—the road was buried beneath snowdrifts... And on top of everything else he had a paralysed right leg. But he was very strong in spirit... His courageous conduct during the Leningrad blockade was remarked upon in the report made by Academician I.Y. Krachkovsky, representative of the Presidium of the USSR Academy of Sciences in Leningrad, at a session of the Academy in Sverdlovsk in 1942..."

Georgi Knyazev regretted that he had not become a writer. He looked at his diary with hope, and he was right to do so. This work was as valuable as the novels and stories of others. How many of those have since sunk without trace into oblivion! Because of its detail, its methodical character and its honesty, Knyazev's diary has preserved a complete picture of life during the blockade, and remains essential to an understanding of the psychology of Leningraders during that time. Packed with facts and accurate, it recreates the inner world of a Soviet intellectual at the time of the Great Patriotic War, and the process of change in his world perception. One cannot, of course, expect of Georgi Knyazev, at his age, the reckless openness of heart so characteristic of Yura Ryabinkin. Knyazev restrains himself, leaving certain things unsaid, for he knows what may and may not be written, even in a diary.

The intensity of his inner life enabled him to suppress hunger. In his

voluminous diary there is virtually nothing about his desire to eat, of how he is starving: either he made himself think of other things, or else the sense of hunger was overpowered by his reflections on the meaning of the years he had lived through, on the events taking place in besieged Leningrad.

In Lydia Okhapkina the sense of hunger abated, giving way to something more acutely felt—as a mother she was more keenly aware of her children's hunger than of her own.

Knyazev was able to switch himself wholly to mental activity—compressing his plans, stretching the instant so that a munute lasted for hours and one day for months. Knyazev could not always succeed in this, and it took some time before he did. Reality, the pangs of hunger, reflections on what had been happening in Leningrad and the world, thoughts of the morrow weighed on him too heavily. But he stubbornly kept returning to that very day, that very instant, convincing himself over and over again that while his country, his people and all of mankind had a future, he had only these instants and he had to live them to the full! For Knyazev, living by the moment meant throwing himself into his work, into as yet unrealised plans, avidly absorbing, with his mind and his feelings, man's history, its dramas, its treasures and its culture. This did not relieve him of everyday problems, of bitter, sorrowful feelings. Nor did he want to be isolated from the general suffering.

“31.1.42. Day 224 of the war. The last day of a difficult month... I live because I have thoughts and plans for the future. It's impossible to read in the semi-dark room, and I work out in my mind my course on the history of culture. If I survive the war, I'll definitely introduce such a course at the University... Just as you put a good face on things when the game's going badly, I try to smile when I'm with other people, to sound cheerful and optimistic in the effort to raise their spirits. It wasn't for nothing that Academician Alexeyev called me 'the great optimist'. Only here, on these pages, do I permit myself to relax my self-restraint. Here I am as I really am.

“Met Svikul, who has just lost her 15-year-old son Volodya, a modest youngster. Inconsolable grief, despair—these are pitiful words in comparison with what is expressed in her eyes, by her sunken cheeks, her quivering chin. I put my arms round her, pressed her to me, and that was all I was able to do.

“3.2.42. Day 227 of the war. M.F. has returned from the Academy distribution centre empty-handed. There was nothing available there again.

“Let us escape from our present-day nightmare. Last night I got on well with my research of the past of Asia Minor and Hittite culture, interspersing these studies with the history of the Academy of Sciences. Let us escape today once again...

“But a few more words for the future reader of these notes. There are all sorts of people even in my 'small radius'. In my neighbours' flat, in the kitchen where they all live, there sits a 'defence lady', that is, the wife of

an engineer on defence work. She can afford acquiring things for bread, cereal, butter and bacon rind. She wants things that are a luxury by today's standards—good underwear, shoes, tablecloths, towels. She is willing to offer a kilogram of bread for a large, almost new carpet, a handful of millet and several lumps of sugar for a beautiful lamp, and for shoes 500 grammes of rice... The bits and pieces she gives them help my hungry neighbours to pull through. As for the lady, she does well. It means that there are among us, the starving people of Leningrad, some well-fed types too!

"And here are a few scenes from our life. At the Archives today there are only two of us 'present', the day watch (the night watch, as I have already said, has had to be stopped because the members of the staff had grown too weak and also because there is not enough firewood to keep the stove warm all night). The two are Doctor of History A.I. Andreyev, and Faina, the furnace woman and worker at the Archives, wife of the stoker, who has been called up. They are sitting in Room 12, by the stove. Andreyev is reading Bauer's doctorate thesis and preparing for the discussion at its presentation. Faina is keeping the stove going and feeling bored. Now and again Andreyev tries to make her laugh over something, and then goes on with his reading. Faina, or Fanya, as she is known at the Archives, a Tartar, the mother of three children, held out till mid-January. I have already commented on her fortitude and stamina. It is a long time since she had any news of her husband or a letter from him. Not once, however, has she complained about her fate. Now she has aged, her complexion has darkened, and she has lost her looks, although she is not yet thirty. Supple and slender, with a natural wit and tact, she must have been beautiful at seventeen or twenty. At a still younger age she probably resembled the Tartar girl in Tolstoy's *Captive of the Caucasus*. Fanya's life was already difficult enough with three children, and now that she has to cope with her family and her work it has become virtually impossible. Her mother-in-law, an old woman, lives with the family, and needs as much looking after as a child. Fanya dreams of being evacuated, of going with the children to her native area, in the Penza region. But since August there has not been a single successful evacuation. Fanya, like all of us, is now going through particularly difficult days. So far her strength sufficed. Will it keep her afloat now?

"Andreyev, who has also aged and become darker complexioned, is finding the strength and will to overcome all difficulties. When M.F., at my request, had to visit the Archives, she came upon this homely scene of archival life.

"The conversation between herself and Andreyev unexpectedly turned to public lavatories.

" 'For a kilogram of bread I'd go and clean the lavatories,' he said, 'but at the moment it's quite enough that I remove all the muck from the flat morning and evening.'

" 'But we don't take it all out,' M.F. remarked.

" 'How's that? Are your toilets working?'

" 'No. Don't you know they use dung for heating down in the south? That's what we've started doing—burning the stuff.'

"The most thoroughly modern conversation, though hardly party talk."

"4.2.42. Day 228 of the war. One more day of war. I haven't the faintest idea what is going on in the world. Those tiny bits of news reported in the press and on the radio do not really do anything to clarify what is happening. 'We have taken point L., given up point V... Such-and-such trophies were captured...' These do not reveal anything of substance.

"Where is mankind heading? How will this dreadful slaughter end and when? Terrible questions... And perhaps out of place as yet, owing to the utter impossibility of resolving them in any way, of finding even approximate answers to them in advance. What is undeniably true is that the war will continue for several more years, and we in Leningrad have not held out even for six months!

"Should I continue these notes once my small radius shrinks even more? I've decided to continue. My distant friend, as you read these pages, you will skip over what is not interesting to you, or is not necessary. But I do not know precisely what is necessary and what is not.

"For example, the cost of a man's suit is now one-and-a-half kilograms of bread. Incidentally, the neighbour, who had thus somehow exchanged a suit for a quarter of a bread ration card, has announced that the card has been lost, to avoid sharing the spoils with her son or her aunt.

"If you succeed in getting a cemetery burial for a person who's died, you do not necessarily secure an 'individual burial', that is, a 'separate grave. In most cases the bodies are buried in trenches, specially dug for the purpose, so that people often say nowadays: 'As long as I don't end up in the trenches', or 'Look out, you'll only be fit for the trenches'.

"That's for the philologist. And here's something for the stage producer: A crowd in the street. All dressed very poorly, but some women try to look 'smart' wearing baggy trousers—red, brown or even blue—that show beneath their skirts. Some simply remain in their trousers. Often women are wearing head scarves instead of hats. Men and women alike often cover the lower part of their faces with kerchiefs or white strips of material. On their feet, for the most part, are felt boots, sometimes worn out to an extraordinary degree. There still remain some 'ladies' in worn astrakhan or tatty squirrel of the kind so common in recent years. Walking along the embankment clad in naval uniform, are 100 per cent civilians, whom we now ironically call 'dry-land sailors'. Some of the women, too, are in naval uniform, and it suits them extremely well. For local colour it should be added that, say, Yevgenia Tolmacheva-Karpinskaya is wearing a long skirt, down to her heels, as women did forty years ago, so that the hem drags along the ground. On her head is the ubiquitous beret of approximately the same distant date.

"8.2.42. Day 232 of the war. I'm feverishly hurrying to live... The wonderful, remarkable person at my side, my wife and friend M.F., has her birthday today...

"In the night, as usual, I awoke in the pitch darkness and reflected on my favourite theme of Christ, that amazing teacher of love and mercy from faraway Galilee. We in fact know nothing about him apart from a

beautiful and moving legend of a dreamer who was killed. All my life I have been linked with this dream-image of human happiness, of love and forgiveness. Many a time has life either revised or dashed this dream, and has now once again cruelly crucified it..."

Georgi Knyazev's diary entries are not just reviews of all he had done or thought. Neither can they be considered just an expression of his sorrow for his unrealised projects, which he, believing that "a sheet of paper is more viable than man", entered into his diary (among them are detailed calculations on how to reorganise archival work, how to re-equip the Archive's repository in a most rational way, and so on). Nor can they be classed just as records of the mental work done by one of the blockaded Leningraders with a view to the future. These entries are, in fact, a message saying that such work (tomorrow's work) was essential for a Leningrader whose aim was to remain human today.

Knyazev's musings about the tragic attempts to save the world by love, about love between man and woman, and, finally, about the meaning of human existence—his most cherished and thoroughly elaborated thoughts, all went into his work, helping him to stand up to the abominable, insulting situation, in which so much depended upon a few grammes of bread...

"M.F. isn't getting enough nourishment. She collects up our things and takes them to the market to be exchanged for food. She's flared up again, and broke out in red blotches when I expressed doubts whether, in view of her weakness and her cold, it was a good thing for her to stand at the market in the biting wind. I found this to be a violation of my theory according to which it was necessary that we economise strength when possible. She might get some bread or some cereal, perhaps, but then might have to take to her bed. We spoke to one another with a kind of inner tension, summoning all our energies to control ourselves...

"This must be how people go mad. Then you have to sort out for yourself whether they were acting sanely or insanely! So M.F.'s gone to the market, and I've taken off my belt, prepared long ago, to see if it was long enough... Just in case...

"M.F. is back. She's brought 100 grammes (1/4 lb) of bread for which she exchanged a dress. And she's happy, her eyes are twinkling... I feel relieved that she's perked up, but pained and sad at realising what we, our inner state, mood and relationships, depend upon on a quarter of a pound of bread!

"Yesterday M.F. and I were dismayed when we learned that Valya had turned up, the girl we wanted to make our ward. We were at work at the time, and she went to our neighbours. There she explained that she was hungry and drained of strength, and had come to spend the night with us. We're living in the hallway, and there's not even an inch of space to spare there. Valya has let herself go, has not washed for several months, her face is black with dirt, her hair is matted and lice-infested. Her eyes are

dulled, her face puffy from drinking too much water. While she was sitting with the neighbours she fell off the chair.

"What were we to do? M.F. declared firmly that there was nowhere in our flat where she could spend the night. Valya said that she hadn't the strength to go back home. She had come on business. Her mother and she were being evacuated, and needed money, various things and food! She had not brought her bread ration cards with her. We had to feed her, and give her money, although not as much as she was asking for (600-700 roubles). At first M.F. gave her fifty roubles, but the girl asked for another twenty. Then M.F. offered to take her home on a sledge, but it turned out that her mother had had to go somewhere which meant that Valya would not manage to get inside anyway. She remained for the night with the neighbours. She told them that all their things had been sold or bartered off, and what had remained had been burnt in a fire. Unfortunately she was not wearing the warm coat M.F. had given her, in spite of the frost. The coat hadn't been burnt, and it was not clear what had become of it.

"We were greatly anguished and had a kind of double feeling. What could we do? Putting her up with us would mean hastening our own end and would not in fact solve anything. Give her our last crust, and money? Our conscience demanded a definite and honest solution. We could do no more than give her what we did. This morning she left. I did not see her before she went."

This situation tortured Knyazev as much as starvation did. Of course he could have told himself he could not act otherwise in the circumstances, it was the reality of the blockade that was to blame. These sober thoughts were capable of dulling both doubts and pangs of conscience. But he did not want that either—not even to make things easier for himself. Feeding a person, even with only a piece of bread and a glass of hot water meant a lot in those days. We, who are reading this today, would have liked him to do even more, to keep Valya in his home, risking his own life. But it was not so, it did not happen, and who could reproach Knyazev for that? Furthermore, by keeping Valya in his home he would have placed a new burden on M.F., already fading with dystrophy—he himself was helpless.

"I could never reconcile myself to the thought of a simple existence, to be nothing but an exister, just as I could not accept the other extreme—to be a fertiliser for the future. There is much that remains unsolved, especially in our day, when tens of millions of human lives must be sacrificed so that their peoples, to whom they belong by birth, may live. All my life I have been tackling the question of God, and of Nature. I admit that these questions still remain open. True, I am not a believer. But it would be truer to say that I have dismissed myself from the resolution of these questions. They are beyond me. All I know is that there is no God that rules the world in accordance with the laws of love. As for some other God, I don't know him, and I don't want to hear of him. I'm my

own god... God as a kind of identity with Nature, a self-creation of Nature is something incomprehensible to me. The universe is enormous beyond measure, its laws too immense and complex, the beginnings of life too enigmatic. The functioning of the animal body is so intricate and the irrationality of Nature so striking that Nature and my human reason are often incompatible. I don't understand Nature. Especially now, in these terrible years and days of manslaughter between Homo sapiens. I bow to the grandeur and beauty of Nature, but I shudder at its cruelty, its blindness and its irrationality.

"Nature is both dialectical and, I repeat, irrational. Perhaps it is only on earth that man—one of Nature's creations—has become conscious of that very Nature and has shuddered in awe and horror as he faced its unfathomed secrets.

"In this connection I find I can't understand those who have appealed for a retreat from reason to nature, for a rejection of culture. My entire life has been dedicated to the service of culture, and the purpose of my life has been to develop, improve and perfect it.

"Mankind's future is a future of culture, the flowering of culture. Mankind will reach this height in its development and our civilisation will become truly cultured.

"This is what cheers me during these onerous, gloomy days through which humanity is living. This is what gives me inspiration to join in the struggle for this future of a cultured humanity. 'Our era', counted from the 'birth of Christ', must either justify itself (but it has not done so, and never can), or must give way to a new 'our era', be replaced by the birth of a new, cultured (truly civilised) and humane society. To many, myself



included, it seemed that such an era had begun on 25th October (7th November) 1917. The future will show whether this is so.

"In any case, for me there is no other era. This era means a future for me, I say boldly 'for me', even though I might die tomorrow: here a future 'for me' and a future 'for us' are one and the same thing.

"10.2.42. Day 234 of the war. A snowy February day. Occasional bursts of gunfire. People passing by. Sledges. Bodies. Dark red patches of blood in the snow. Collapsed door frames at the entrances to shops; sheets of plywood instead of glass in the windows. A smashed lorry opposite the sphinxes. An advertisement hoarding with old posters left from the summer. A showcase affixed to the University railings with an Informbureau report dated 1st November and very outdated caricatures. A dead clock showing unreal time... That's the whole of my journey.

"Within a few days the second evacuation of the Academy's staff is to take place. Everyone who can is going! 'St Petersburg will be empty'... Surely the old and fearful prophesy in not going to come true!

"I'm hurrying to live. My brain is teeming with thoughts. Yesterday and today I jotted down some of my thoughts on Monelle—the Instant. Marcel Schwob wrote a poem about it, which struck me some thirty-five years ago with its originality and the refinement of the most *recherché* decadence. I remember that the translation was done by Amfi-teatrov. And right now, for some reason, I felt like rewriting it in my own way...

"Now it's night-time. Somewhere, and evidently not so far away from us, heavy missiles are dropping. Somewhere the earth gasps and sighs from the impact each time, and the walls of the house tremble. Then the tense silence engulfs again. I cannot hear the firing from this windowless corridor-cum-hallway in which we live.

"In these minutes of utmost tension, when one such accidental hit could ensure that nothing remained of these sheets of paper, of our flat, or our whole house, I am writing a poem about Monelle. Carried away, I no longer hear the eerie night silence being broken by dull thuds and the trembling of the house walls. That is why this apparently remote theme, which might seem quite inappropriate among these notes on the war, is so dear to me at the moment.

"Our nerves are taut the whole time. Starvation or semi-starvation has stupefied or half-stupefied many people. Others have let themselves go, are on edge, and are given to quarrelling and swearing. After all, you've got to live somehow or other, to show those around that you're alive. It's better to be writing a poem about Monelle than to be cursing everything and everyone in helpless agony to put things right, to change one's life.

"To die is not difficult, to be dying is very hard..."

In Georgi Knyazev's diary the 244th day of the war has been reached.

"20.2.42. Friday. The people of our ill-fated city are abandoning all their possessions, the homes where at least they had a roof over their heads, their near and dear ones, if those are weak, leaving them to die, and are going away from Leningrad. A constant stream of people extends towards the Finland Station, young and old, men and women, pulling sledges piled with their goods and chattels, not more than a few packages for each. It's the great exodus. Those who are remaining behind grit their teeth and say nothing. In their eyes is concealed anguish and alarm. But there are also others who display nothing but total indifference. What will be will be!

"I am carrying on my duty as a chronicler. I glance into every face, every pair of eyes I encounter. I try to observe everything, to record all that I see on my small radius. Now ahead of me is the task of preparing to hand over my manuscripts and printed works to the Archives of the Academy of Sciences. I should also like to write down some literary works conceived long ago, and snatches of reminiscences illuminating the past. In short, to sum up results.

" 'While the Academy of Sciences Archives are safe and sound, your manuscripts will be out of danger,' I tried to reassure an assistant professor as he went off into evacuation.

"I also have to hurry to put my manuscripts and papers into order. It's too cold to work in my office, and in the nook in which I live at present you can't turn round. With some slight exceptions my manuscripts consist of material unknown to anyone and never before published. At the present time, when many materials and cultural treasures of immense value are being destroyed, less important documents acquire new significance. In such circumstances my manuscripts probably also deserve protection and preservation. They are my whole life. In January I worked out the final plan for putting my papers in order and decided to hand them over temporarily to the Academy of Sciences Archives, where they are to remain permanently in the event of my death. Only will the Archives be preserved?

"Now all my thoughts are concentrated on how best to keep up the waning life of the Academy's Archives, which are in my custody and which should be preserved as one of the most wonderful archives on the history of Russian culture, and especially science, over a period of more than two centuries.

"My strength and that of my colleagues is constantly diminishing...

"22.2.42. Day 246. M.F. grows thinner not by the day but by the hour.

* That was the approximate number of Leningraders evacuated in 1942—in the harshest of circumstances.





Today she went to the food distribution centre where they are supposed to have meat rations available. She went first thing this morning, without having anything to eat. Yesterday she was busy from morning till evening, dashing off to the market to barter and to the canteen for porridge. I'm afraid she won't have enough strength. Have I? I do my best to keep going. But there are times when I totally lose strength.

"A. V. Nekhorosheva-Karpinskaya, a student, popped in. She had altogether three examinations left to take—and then she would have finished University. She did not want to be evacuated, and was expelled. There was a great deal of agitation at the University—to go or not to go? Nekhorosheva did not go because of her mother for whom the journey itself would have been too much. And besides they don't think it will be any better for them out there than it is here in Leningrad. 'There we'd be refugees, here we have a roof over our heads, and also some belongings which we can use for bartering,' she said. Her two aunts, her mother and herself are fiercely fighting for life. Their grandfather, Alexander Karpinsky, bequeathed to them great vitality and a strong will to live.

" 'My former horror gave way to fury,' she told me. 'If I survive the war and live to see fifty, I shall write my reminiscences. I shall write about everything that people will have forgotten. Or won't want to remember. I bet nobody's recording anything at the moment: it's not the time, and those who flee from Leningrad will only want to speak of themselves. I shall therefore do my best to remember, so that I can write it down later.'

"I did not say a word, of course, about the fact that I was writing down all that I saw, thought or experienced. I did not tell her that I was doing it right now, without fear of contradictions, lengthiness or repetitions. For that's life. And what will be written afterwards as memoirs will be far removed from what we are going through now.

"Just a stone's throw from our house, right by the bridge, they've placed three heavy naval guns. On the embankment there's a lot of hustle and bustle reminiscent of September. All the time I was on my way to work there was firing. The missiles were exploding somewhere in the area of Nevsky Prospekt and Sadovaya Street.

"Everything that I saw left me heavy-hearted. There are great ordeals ahead of us. And M.F.'s overtaxed organism and strained nerves gave way today—she burst into tears... I look at her with a quiet, secret fear—her skin has darkened, her cheeks are sunken, and yesterday she complained of her gums... This morning she got up quite weak, but now she's working: she's brought up firewood from the cellar to our second floor, she's lit the *burzhuika*, and put on to boil less than half a pound of dried peas to feed the two of us for two days—it's all we have for our rations till the end of these first ten days of the month. 'I don't think I can last out,' M.F. said in a gentle and quiet voice. And tears, big tears, rolled down the little, wrinkled, old-womanish (!) face of my exceptionally staunch wife.

"It's possible we, too, won't hold out. I asked at work this morning how we could help L.V. Modzalevsky. In no way, it appeared. His wife is

hardly likely to survive, and it is possible that he, too, is doomed. It's frightful to think of it!

"Our life is becoming more complicated every hour. Everyone who possibly can is rushing to leave the city. And what's ahead? 'Ahead,' said my M.F., 'is utter hopelessness.' I tried to calm her. I did not let myself go. I took a book of verse and read, enjoying every line of it. 'You look at things like a philosopher,' M.F. told me. 'As for me, I simply love life... I just love every minute of it...'

"In the afternoon the sun was dazzling over the white shroud of the Neva and its embankments, covered with freshly fallen snow. I travelled along in my wheel-chair, shielding my face from the blinding sun, and thought: I also have something else to live for—the present moment. It exists! There is no need to contemplate the future!

"But at work I kept my sad thoughts to myself. I was cheerful and animated. I talked with professor of history Andreyev, who was cooking something on the stove. I did what I could to resume work at the Archives. From the stove ashes flew from the burning files, as usual, and before me sat gloomy, tired, hungry people such as the half-dead Tsvetkova, who had come in after an illness, and the sight of whom made my heart contract with pain.

"Home is cold and in utter disorder; and the most dreadful thing is the hopelessness of our existence. But I'm still not going to give in!

"How much I have thought about in this period. I have written a lot, but not everything of course. My entries from January to March require careful editing. But while there is still time I should like to record at least a part of my thoughts and experiences, even without an adequate system and stylistic polish... My haste is justified.

"Today on the pavement I had to make way for a double sledge coming toward me. On it lay a corpse, carefully and lovingly sewn up in a blue plush bed cover. I shuddered I didn't know why. It is such a common sight in Leningrad these days. Other Leningraders did not even blink at the sight. Was it my over-nervousness and sensitivity? Well, call it what you will. I know I shuddered because of that blue plush cover. I had looked at many corpses with indifference, corpses wrapped in canvas or in rags. But this blue cover in the frosty sunshine was so bright that it struck the eye. It was the colour of the blue sky beyond the sun that blinded me as I moved along.

"The encounter took place by the University, by my own old building, now empty and abandoned... So I moved on, deep in thought, as far as the Academy of Arts, also empty and abandoned... There was snow outside the main gate, which was locked, and on the snow someone had left the dark brown traces of excrement. Opposite are the sphinxes, my constant companions in these twelve and a half years of my life. Around them are heaps of snow. They, too, are snow-wrapped. But they still stand there, they're still there so far. That gives me serenity. They speak to me of the 3,500 years of mankind's prehistory. The real history of mankind lies ahead! "

Quite a lot has been written of how the Road of Life operated, and we have given considerable space to it. *Olga Moskovtseva* was one of those who worked on this escape route, but her daughter remained in Leningrad. At the first opportunity Olga Moskovtseva travelled back to the city to fetch her. Her daughter was thirteen. The mother asked her chief if she could have in advance, as a loan, a couple of loaves and a few cabbages, not black ones like they usually got, but...

"but white cabbages, because the girl is weak, sick and I have to get her up. And some herring. Well, my mates let me have some pieces, as a loan. I took a whole plateful to her but she turned me out of the house. 'I'd rather die than take any of your bread,' she said. 'Where did you get two loaves from? You stole them!' I said I hadn't stolen them, I'd come on a business trip, and showed her my papers and documents for the bread... I took her with me. She could hardly walk, and they helped me carry her to the car. Taking her across Lake Ladoga we had to keep checking that she was still alive. Later she began to walk a little. I would take her to the kitchen. There she chopped pine needles that we ate for vitamins. We were building the railway to Lake Ladoga..."

Although in the first and second part of this book, there are stories, recollections and diary entries about the evacuation of Leningrad children, we have not had the opportunity to show all the aspects of the intensive work carried out by a wide variety of organisations—Party and military—to put into operation the Road of Life across Ladoga. The facts and events we quote here were only part of the enormously difficult work done to save Leningraders.

A batch of yellowing papers, held together by a rusty paper clip. Reports from a social service squad. They are all about M. Lazarev, aged twenty-one, living at 18 Mezhdunarodny Prospekt. The girls in this Komsomol squad, judging by their reports, found him alone, lying in a helpless state.

"He is suffering from emaciation, has no relatives, and no one to take care of him. At present he is lying in someone else's room, but that family will be evacuated on 31.3.42. Comrade Lazarev will then remain all alone in this flat. There is no firewood. He himself works at the Marti Factory, shop 22. He has no money and no one to fetch his ration cards for him. His mother has died and their things are still in the pawn-shop. He asks to be taken to hospital as quickly as possible."

The report is signed by Krylova, a member of a social service squad, and dated 29th March 1942.

The Secretary of the district Party committee writes: "Contact the Oktyabrsky district committee so that they can help comrade Lazarev to get into his factory's hospital."

For the time being members of the squad continued to visit Lazarev. Every day they made entries in their reports.

1st April. "Received ration cards for patient Lazarev, had them



registered, bought bread, fetched dinner from the canteen and fed him. Section commander K. Shvetsova."

3rd April. "Received money from Marti Factory for the sick leave certificate. Brought dinner from the canteen and fed the patient."

On 4th April Shvetsova and Kiryushkina buy bread, bring dinner, then feed and wash the patient. And so it continues every day until 9th April. Here is the last entry: "At his request we went to the polyclinic No. 28, Frunze district, to fetch the doctor. Section commander K. Shvetsova, rank-and-file member Kiryushkina."

There are no more reports.

Those squads took on practically everything imaginable. Alexei Sheetov, a soldier, asked in a letter from the front for someone to go to his flat in Maklin Prospekt to see "what state it's in, and if it's occupied, then to ask whoever's living there if I might correspond with him. The point is that I'm waiting for letters from my family, and they may be lying about there unanswered, for no one in the house knows my present address".

The Party committee of a defence works thanked the chairman of the social service commission, M. Sidorova, for the help offered by one of her squads to a team which had come from the rear to fetch the families of those working at the factory. As far as one can gather from the text of the note, the team had to find 190 families. Because of shelling and fires many families had moved, some people had died, others lay in hospital. The girls of that social service squad were able to find out what their situation and condition were. The amount of work involved can be assessed from the fact that city transport was not operating, and they had

to walk to countless addresses, to visit military hospitals, housing offices and children's homes. "We, the evacuation team, have received from you clear and precise information about all the families. Once again, we thank all the members of your social service squad."

It is impossible to assess and estimate the contribution made to victory by Leningraders fighting at the frontline and working in the city. One can, of course, give the number of defeated enemy divisions and units, of KV tanks repaired at the Kirov Works, and of missiles and mines made there. But how can anyone evaluate the contribution made by those whom Knyazev calls passive defenders of Leningrad, who simply lived and endeavoured not to give in to death in the beleaguered city, to save their children, as Lydia Okhapkina and thousands of other women did? Or those like Yura Ryabinkin? We shall not calculate the number of incendiary bombs he put out—even if there were none at all Yura would still be part of the living Leningrad.

What about the contribution to victory made by those Leningraders who today are not even considered to have been participants in World War Two, are not classed as veterans of that war? The poet Sergei Narovchatov, who fought in the Sinyavinsky Marshes, told us: "We could not have hung on there for so long, weakened by hunger as we were, if at our side there had not been that huge living city—Leningrad! It would have been impossible to defend simply forest and bog."

Lydia Okhapkina and Yura Ryabinkin—living, not surrendering to hunger and to despair—they, too, were an essential part of the Leningrad Front, and perhaps even more than that.

For those fighting in the Byelorussian forests it was equally important to know that Moscow was holding out, that Leningrad refused to give in! Not in retrospect, but from there, from wartime, from the memory of one of the authors of this book come feelings and facts confirming how important it was to Byelorussia's underground movement and its partisans to know that Leningrad did not simply stand inviolable to the enemy, but drained their strength and self-confidence. At the time we did not know, could not know, at what price this was achieved. To us who had seen with our own eyes how triumphantly the Germans had begun their march East, the main thing was that Leningrad held out. Leningrad halted that march and indicated a limit to German strength. The defeat of the German army near Moscow shattered the myth of the German superiority. The city on the Neva demonstrated the enemy's impotence. It was like a nightmare for Hitler that for years his troops proved unable to take even one step forward.

At the time we did not know who to pay tribute to for what seemed to us from afar, from Byelorussia, iron fortitude of the Leningraders. Participation in the work on this book by the Byelorussian co-author will be such a tribute, although a belated one, to all who fought in the city. Now we see that they were not made of iron, those real Leningraders, which is why they deserve even greater respect for all they did.

“...WHY DID YOU TAKE OFF YOUR CAP?”

Lydia Okhapkina had already lost hope of leaving the city when on 4th March the same lieutenant who had brought the parcel from her husband turned up and asked her to prepare urgently for departure.

“We will be going across Lake Ladoga by vehicles. For that I have to get evacuation papers through the district executive committee, and then I must go to Chaikovskaya Street for a parcel. I can’t tell you how glad I was to be going. That same day I went to the executive committee of the Vasilievsky district, and there got the documents made out. They warned me that the road was dangerous, that there had been cases of lorries falling through the ice. But the main thing, they added, was that they would take no responsibility for whatever happened to us. It all sounded so funny in the circumstances that I asked: ‘And what if we die from hunger in Leningrad. Do you take on the responsibility for that?’ I decided I was going no matter what. So next morning I went for the parcel, having fed my two children and given them a kiss each. I took the sledge and went first to my husband’s elder brother to get my suitcase with some of our things, a suit of my husband’s and my autumn coat. He lived in Pervaya Krasnoarmeiskaya Street, also a long distance from us. Nothing particular happened to me on the way. The city was still gloomy and grey, buried in snowdrifts. But the sun was already glancing, now at the houses, now into people’s faces, and it seemed to me that there was a slightly livelier look in their eyes. What also made me feel more cheerful was that from 1st March the bread ration for the children and myself had been raised by 150 grammes. Having collected my suitcase from my husband’s relatives, I asked them to see me home, promising to share with them whatever was in the parcel. I had not yet got it. They refused—they, too, looked emaciated. I went off again, walking all the way to Chaikovskaya Street to pick up the parcel. It was a long journey and I stopped again to get some bread, which I ate there and then, for I hoped to feed the children on whatever was in the parcel. All the time I kept worrying about them, thinking they must be lying there crying, all alone and unfed. It was 8 p.m., and already getting dark. When I’d been fixed up with all the documents and taken the parcel, I went home, pulling the sledge along...”

Her difficult, agonising journey from one end of the city to the other was described in the first part of the book, and we have consequently omitted it from this part of the story.

“At last, when it was already three in the morning, I arrived home. I could not drag the sledge over the high threshold at the entrance, so I left it all in the street, and practically crawled up the stairs to the door. I opened it and began calling for Rosa, then I took a peep into my room. On hearing my voice the children started crying, the two of them at once. Oh, my poor darlings, you’re alive, I’ll give you something to eat in a minute. Rosa and I rushed down the stairs. I said to her: quick, as fast as

you can, the sledge is by the gate, hurry up! There's a lot of food there, I'll feed you till you're full. With great difficulty we dragged all the baggage up to the flat. I took off my coat and fell on the bed, totally exhausted. The children were crying, but for at least twenty minutes I was in no state to go to them. After that I opened the parcel and found it consisted almost entirely of rye rusks, with only two packets of millet. I soon got the stove going and put some porridge on to cook. I fed the children and Rosa. We spent all night packing things for the journey. I was so tired that Rosa had to call in two women, who helped me, and I gave them some rusks.

"The next day, March 6th, 1942, I set off again for Chaikovskaya Street, this time with my children and baggage, for that's where the rallying point was. A woman helped me by pulling the sledge, and I had the children. I gave her half a kilogram of millet and four rye rusks. It was 11 o'clock, and we were supposed to be at the rallying point at 12. Like me, she was weak, and found it hard going to pull the sledge. The two of us could scarcely put one foot before the other. I was very nervous and afraid to be late. To make things still worse, there was a fierce blizzard raging. By now it was already half-past one, and we were only just reaching Liteiny Bridge. You were allowed to walk there in the daytime. Suppose we were late? All my agonies, all that expenditure of strength would have been in vain. By that time I had given away almost all the rusks and millet, which meant we were going to starve again. These thoughts made my heart bleed. My temples were throbbing. Once again I was bathed in sweat. For the journey I'd put clean underwear on, then two woollen dresses and on top of all that a suit of my husband's to save it and keep snug and warm. I felt very hot, and I unbuttoned my coat. The wind seared my face, but I felt nothing. One last effort, another step, then another. Once again I counted the steps. Later on, because of the journey and the wind I caught a chill, which developed into purulent pleurisy with fever, but I'll say more about that later.

"At last we got there—it was already three by then. The lorry was standing there, it hadn't left. It turned out I wasn't the only one who was late. When I got into the lorry we were warned once again that the road was dangerous, there would be shelling and so on. I said that I knew that but all the same I was going. As we drove through the streets I mentally said goodbye to the city. Farewell, my much-suffering city, I thought, farewell, people.

"There was a snowstorm on the lake, too, but it was rather weak. At first we travelled fast, but later the lorry slowed down almost to a stop. A man was going along in front of us, scraping at the snow with his skis, for there could have been holes in the ice made by shells where the ice was not very firm.

"Later I wrote a verse about that road:

*Many and more are the broad roads around,
With travellers' laughter they loudly resound,
Swept by the wind, the storms of the spring,
Sheltered by poplars lining the fringe.*

*But I knew a road that carried life's breath,
Ladoga's ice-road, a rescue from death,
For the starving its message was hope newly found.*

"This was the road along which I travelled in a lorry through a snowstorm with my little daughter and son.

"There were ten or twelve of us in it. Only women and children. The driver was an armyman, and with him in the cab was another man.

"I was in the weakest condition of all the people in that lorry. I felt we were travelling a long, long way. The lorry was screened from the wind by sheets of plywood, and some of the exhaust fumes were being fed back into it. My head was whirling and aching. I and the children were in a semi-conscious state. I felt nauseous, and vomited several times, and I was feverish. I felt I had a high temperature, and I was very hot. Someone gave me medicine, and put a wet towel on my head. I was totally indifferent to everything—I was losing consciousness. When I came round I asked where we were, and where the children were. They told me that we were all there, in the lorry, and that the children were alive. Someone had fed them, someone had sat them on the pot. I cannot imagine how I had managed to withstand the journey. Feeble from starvation, from the exhausting trips I had made the previous day, I had caught a chill into the bargain, with a high temperature. Probably, maternal instinct had made me struggle on for the sake of the children.

"The first stop. The first evacuation centre. There were good, kind people to meet us. They helped us to get out of the lorry, and carried the children. They put me on a bench. We were in a big, roughly made building out of new planks. There were benches by the walls, and in the middle two or three iron stoves, which were burning all the time. We were brought food. The children had semolina with condensed milk, and we were given meat soup with noodles. But I couldn't eat a thing. My mouth and throat were badly inflamed and sore. I couldn't swallow, and anyway I had lost my appetite completely. So I gave my dinner to the driver. The next day we set off again—we were supposed to reach Cherepovets. My husband's army unit was temporarily stationed there. On the way we made another stop in a village in the Leningrad region. That village had been almost entirely burnt down by the Germans. We spent the night in one of the few homes still standing. I felt awful and had a bad cough. My fever did not die down. But they kept giving me aspirin which one of the women had. Our next stop was in the town of Tikhvin. That town had been in German hands twice, and twice our troops had driven them out. Nearly all the buildings there were destroyed, too.

"Finally we arrived at Cherepovets—that was on March 11, 1942. When the lorry stopped outside one of the houses, my husband immediately climbed inside. He looked round and then jumped off again. He had not recognised us, while I, of course, knew him immediately. My throat had seized up in excitement, and I couldn't cry out to attract attention. The children didn't recognise him. He was in military uniform. I heard him ask whether I had come or not. They told him that I was in the lorry with the children. He got in again and started looking round. In a hoarse voice he

began asking everyone in turn: 'Are you Lida?!' then jumped off the lorry again. He started weeping, and for some reason took off his cap. Then, pulling himself together, he cried: 'Lida! Tolya!' and once again tears rolled down his cheeks. I couldn't answer him. I looked at him in silence. I felt as if I had a limp in my throat. I wanted to speak but my tongue seemed to have become numb. The lorry was crammed with packages, and I was sitting in the very corner. Then he called out: 'Tolya, come on then, come to me—quickly!' In a strange voice, I said: 'He can't walk.' The whole conversation was just as I have described it. The meeting was both joyful and bitter. It will remain in my memory for the rest of my life. Then, one after the other, he got us off the lorry and carried us into a house. They'd allocated an empty room to four families. Each family occupied a corner.

"It was dark in the room. In Cherepovets there was also a blackout at night. The men were healthy, the women emaciated. The women and their husbands whispered quietly to each other and we could hear them sobbing. I could not speak, my cough was too bad. I had a fever, and pains in my head and my chest. The woman whose house we were staying in got some milk from somewhere and heated it for me and the children. She said she'd get some more milk, and also some potatoes the next day. I couldn't believe my ears. It was too good to be true. Milk, potatoes—what happiness! I decided to change my underwear. As I undressed I showed my husband what I looked like naked. See what I've come to, I said. I was just a skeleton with skin stretched over the bones. My breasts looked particularly awful—just ribs. Mind you, I'd been a nursing mother when the war started. My legs were skinny, about as thick as a half-litre bottle. Vasya took a look, and blinked away more tears. Never mind, he said, since the bones are there the flesh will accumulate in a while. There was no intimacy between us, it was out of the question, even though ten months had passed since we'd seen each other last. We spent five days living in that room. Then we decided to go to Saratov, where my mother and two sisters lived. My husband was given a ten days leave. We got on a train which had come from Leningrad. It was a goods train. Once again things were cold and uncomfortable on the journey. The passengers were evacuees from Leningrad and were just as skinny and starved as I was. We were travelling with that lieutenant who had come to see us in Leningrad and also his wife and son. They wanted to come with me to Saratov. On the way emaciated, sick people died.

"At every station we were fed, and my husband would rush off for food with a saucepan. He would bring porridge or soup, but I scarcely ate anything. I became more and more ill. At one station I also got off for a breath of fresh air. My husband remained inside to feed the children. Suddenly, without warning, the train started. I ran, gasping for breath, towards my coach. It wasn't far, and I managed to grab the handrail. The train was picking up speed, but while it was passing the station platform, where the snow was cleared away, my legs did not reach the wheels. Someone shouted: 'Lida's outside!' Before my eyes flashed the face of my husband and those of my children, and with lightning rapidity came the thought: 'So this is where I'll meet my end! Not from starvation, not

from bombing, but here, like this.' After that I fainted. Vasya had managed to grab my collar, and the lieutenant helped him to haul me into the coach. When I came to, the first thing I noticed was that the toe part of the felt boots had been torn away. My right big toe was somewhat crushed, and blood was running from it. If the boots had not been too big for me—they were a large size for they weren't mine but my husband's—then I'd probably have lost my legs, or at least my feet. If my husband had grabbed hold of my collar just a second later and had not pulled me away from the wheels, the train would have crushed and killed me.

"With such an experience added to my illness, I collapsed altogether. Tortured by my never-ending coughing and high temperature, I thought I should die on the journey. The train was a slow one. At one stop a medical team came aboard. The doctor quickly examined the passengers and ordered those of them who were especially sick and weak to be taken off on stretchers. When he looked at me he also ordered that I be taken off, saying: 'This one will have to go to hospital—typhus.' I protested that I'd had typhus when I was a little girl, in 1922, and that what I had now was probably pneumonia. He said: 'We'll sort that out at the hospital.'

"The skin all over my body was dry and was peeling off because of emaciation, and I looked as if I had a rash—like a chicken that's been plucked. This was why the doctor thought I had typhus. My husband was horrified. If they took me to hospital, what would become of the children? When the doctor and his assistants had gone, we decided to hurry and get off to the other side of the train, right into the snow. The lieutenant and his family came away with us. The train started and we remained sitting on our things in the snow. Our husbands went to find out what station we were near, and to find a sleigh with horses to get us to the railway station. When they came back on a sleigh, my husband said that this was Semibratovo station in the Yaroslavl region. We loaded our belongings on the sleigh, got in and drove off to the station. There they put me on a bench, for I could neither walk nor stand. People surrounded us, and gazed at me. They must have thought I looked particularly strange and frightening: 'How thin and awful-looking, and with a young baby, too!' 'That's probably not hers', 'Perhaps she's the grandmother.'

"We stopped in one of the villages in the Yaroslavl region, and no one wanted to put us up in their house, thinking that I had something infectious. In the end one woman agreed to take us. The next day my husband had to go back. He bought us a sack of potatoes, and got a kilogram of fresh butter and some milk. When we parted he kissed me on the forehead. I told him that he was kissing me as if I were already dead. Then he kissed me on the lips. I was ill for a long while. The village doctor came, and also diagnosed typhus. The woman whose house we were staying in was scared and had me moved to a store-room, which was cold and dirty. There I lay for two days. When the doctor called again and examined me thoroughly, he found that it was lung trouble. I asked him to apply cupping-glasses. He started coming and putting them on me. I



Lydia Okhapkina's little daughter, Nina.

was ill for over a month. After that I began to recover. When I'd recovered sufficiently I started working on the collective farm. I wore myself out in order to earn something. I exchanged all the clothing I'd brought with me for milk for the children. I'd never been in the country in my life, and I didn't know anything about the work of the peasants, but life taught me. I spent three years in the village."

That is the story of Lydia Okhapkina, the story of a mother who saved her children. You may say that there's nothing special about it, nothing heroic, that it's simply the way it should be... You might be right. The only thing that's special is the happiness of a mother who has saved her children and triumphed over death itself. Lydia Okhapkina did not know then that her little daughter would nevertheless die from tuberculosis and a serious stomach disease she had contracted in Leningrad. She died in evacuation, like thousands of other Leningraders who believed they had broken out of the icy embrace of blockade death.

When you read Lydia Okhapkina's notes it makes you ponder on how love and hunger meet in conflict on their pages. People say that love and hunger rule the world. This suggests the existence of two dominant feelings—sometimes one emerges on top, sometimes the other. In this story they clashed in open and ferocious combat, the battlefield being the mother's heart. The three Okhapkins could, of course, have all died in Leningrad from hunger, but that would not have meant the defeat of love, either. Lydia Okhapkina's love for her children held fast, nothing could break it.

As we thought about Lydia Okhapkina we involuntarily placed her side by side with Yura Ryabinkin and Georgi Knyazev. If we define the chief thing taking place within each of them it can probably be expressed as follows: in Yura Ryabinkin—it was the pangs of conscience, in Georgi Knyazev—tireless work of the reason, and in Lydia Okhapkina—love to the point of self-abandon. This, of course, is an over-simplification, one in which much is lost, but it is these three fundamentals that are above all represented in their diaries and notes. So it comes out that our three central figures embodied the three principal mainstays of man's life.

THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE UNRIGHTEOUS

Georgi Knyazev:

"9.4.42. Day 292 of the war. I'm in a hurry to live. I awoke early in the morning and thoughts started seething in my mind. I must get this done, finish that, accomplish in the space of a few months, if only partially, work for which even three years would not have been enough!

"And there's a lot I'd like to write... About my wife and friend I'd like to write paeans and poems. I'd also like to pay tribute to the wives of astronomer Berg, archaeologist Chayev and many more, who have fought and have done everything to save their husbands, but who, in the main, have lost them. I also feel I have to write about that simple woman, who told me about the last hours of her husband, Blokhin, the janitor at the Central Archives.

"Some future poet, whose eye perhaps lights upon these pages, might become inspired to write such a paean or poem to women who selflessly withstood all manner of ordeals and devoted every effort to saving their husbands. The fact that I am still alive is entirely due to M.F. It is no mere flowery phrase when I say that she is a devoted person and a modest heroine!

"13.4.42. Day 296 of the war. Someone once said: 'Man is too extended, it would not hurt to narrow him down...' All this winter I've been living solely in the present instant; yet at the same time I've been living in past centuries, past millennia, working on a chronological treatise on the history of culture: 'Major cultural events and bloodstained failures'. How infinitely wide are man's possibilities: ascents to the heights, descents, flashes of genius like cosmic stars of the first magnitude, and alongside them, savage monsters and villains. There are those whose names are known to history, and billions of anonymous men, whom nobody can remember, because nothing is known of them, but who once lived and died. And all of them together make up mankind!

"That's life as it really is. That's people as they really are... And it makes your hair stand on end to think of what they have done to the earth, their home, how they have abused it. Blood, tears, conflagrations, violence, the gallows, shootings, plunder and suffering, suffering throughout the world! And all this done by people who had among

their number Christ, Socrates, the blessed Augustine, Confucius, Lao-Tai, Buddha, and Tolstoy! ..

"12.5.42. Day 325 of the war. It appears that I have a contemporary who records rumours. I, as I have already said, do not write them down; I have taken only facts, and have only recorded a rumour when it concerned some fact I was unable to verify. This person I have in mind is E.G. Oldenburg.

"Today she helped me take down from the wall a poster bearing an inscription about the defence of our city. It had hung there all winter long, through rain, snow, blizzard and gunfire: 'We shall not surrender our city!' Leningraders have held their city. In fifty or a hundred years, such posters will become rare museum pieces. Our descendants will bow their heads before them. This scrap of paper, carefully preserved, will say more about Leningrad's ordeal than hundreds of written pages. It is a living document of its time...

"When E.G. Oldenburg was helping me take that poster down from the wall, she told me she had filled several exercise books, recording all her impressions day by day, and all the rumours she heard.

"So I'm not the only one writing. But nobody writes about things precisely as I do for each of us sees and experiences everything in his own unique way...

"Romashevsky has kept a record of alarms from the start of the war (he's counted 359 up to May 1942), also writing about various incidents that took place while he was on watch-duty. V.A. Petrov, it turns out, has been doing the same thing. And some things I've been recording. It means that material is coming to light, and there is quite a lot of it!

"I have discovered that during the winter months out of the 200 people living in our house, 65 have died, that is, about 35 per cent."

In another diary we read this:

"26.4.42. Someone told me of an old man who was to some degree involved in the arts. After he died they found among his effects a medal made by himself with the inscription 'I lived in Leningrad in 1942'. Maybe after the war all Leningraders ought to be given such medals.

"Another thing: in some beautiful spot in the city, or in a park, I'd erect a memorial to all those who died during the blockade, and carve the number of dead in the stone. That would be more magnificent than the Lucerne lion." (K.V. Polzikova-Rubets).

That's the kind of thoughts people were having in April 1942, when they livened up a little with the first warm rays of the sun. They were still physically weak, were dying from starvation, missiles were still bursting in the streets, and houses collapsing, but people suddenly acquired a new self-awareness. In those early spring days Sasha Nesterov, a teenager, came up to the mirror and looked at his own reflection: 'Dystrophy was what I saw there.'

People began to look around, and to see things. Among the grief, the

love, the feats of self-sacrifice and duty other things were becoming apparent.

A polarisation was taking place, the good was revealing itself in its beauty, and the bad in all its hideousness. Here there were different constituents: thieving and speculation, people making a good thing out of starvation, stealing food, exchanging it for gold, valuables, paintings, and furs, and there were those engaged in drunken revelry ('We live only once!'), there were all kinds of things going on in that multimillioned city. It is strange, though, that such cases rarely crop up in the diaries, they have to be sought out. People did not write so much about them, and recall them with reluctance, although they agree that if these things are bypassed the picture is incomplete.

As we were on our rounds, we paid a visit to a well-known collector. What emerged with the greatest prominence in his story was his pride at the way he had succeeded in adding to his collection during the blockade. How he had obtained items from other collectors, who were dying, in exchange for a tiny piece of bread. He might have got them out of people who were being evacuated and could not take anything with them. On the surface, everything in his stories sounded decent. According to him, he did not "get things out" of people, he was "helping" them, "preserving" things that might otherwise have been destroyed altogether in bombed houses. Didn't he "save" the priceless collections of those who were dying of hunger, collections that the neighbours might have used to keep the stove fuelled? He cannot be accused of any criminal activity, and and so we have no right to name him, but the reaction his story aroused was definitely unpleasant. Of course, like a true collector, he was a fanatic. There are among collectors people who are selfish, greedy and importunate, those who are ready to humble themselves, to beg, even to deceive. But here there was something else. In that enormous flat his father, and later his mother had died of hunger and of neglect, while he continued his wheeling and dealing, adding to his priceless collection. He showed us huge cupboards adorned with bronze busts of ancient writers, rare monographs, engravings and his famous card index. They really were unique items, but they failed to arouse our delight. We could not admire them. Through them the whole tragedy of the blockade was too blatantly visible. He had made unscrupulous, merciless use of that tragedy, collecting on the way not only the objects of his mania but, evidently, other artistic treasures.

We must admit that not once during our investigations did we meet people who had been speculators during the blockade, or those who made profit out of the sufferings of war, who took gold or paintings for a loaf of bread, who bought up furs, furniture, bronze and porcelain in exchange for bread and cereal. Nor did we meet any of those who robbed hospital patients, or stole food from canteens and nursery schools... They existed, of course, but no one will admit to it, will speak of it in relation to himself. There were probably such people among those who declined to speak to us, who refused to receive us.

After the war it often happened that a blockade survivor would walk into a stranger wearing his or her clothes, or would find a family relic appropriated by another.

"There was this example... I had had a little brooch in the form of a dagger. My aunt was married to a naval officer and at some time he had had this brooch made for her—a gold dagger in a black and ivory sheath. This had been passed on to my mother with some other things of my aunt's...

"Many years elapsed. One day I went to the hairdresser's. I sat down. Suddenly a girl came in wearing that brooch. I was nonplussed—what a coincidence! I couldn't be mistaken because it had been made to order. I was at a loss. That was all. I never saw the girl again, so I could not find out anything about that brooch." (*Nina Sizenevskaya*).

In those blockade days people looked on the healthy and well-fed with suspicion and hostility, immediately taking them to be swindlers. In his diary for September 1942 *Ivan Savinkov* mentions the *nouveaux riches*, or, as he puts it, the new aristocrats, those who prospered on swindling and plundering food stocks. He notes their well-fed air, their self-confidence and smart clothes.

But at the same time, fascist bombs dropping all around, Georgi Knyazev found himself carried away by the poetry of Goethe:

*You will not set my land atremble
Or ruin my modest home:
'Tis not thy creation...*

Neither self-interest, nor egoism, nor the temptation to save their skin at the expense of others could shake people like Knyazev, could undermine their fundamental essence—their unshakeable conscience.

THE WEIGHT OF BOOKS

"14.3.42. Nothing special, a day like any other... A night like many others in this beleaguered city"—this was how Georgi Knyazev saw the 266th day of the war. "The blockade is not yet lifted, and that's the whole trouble. I long ago resolved not to think about the future. Now the same question has arisen once more—what ought we to do? Months ago we took a decision to remain in Leningrad and not go anywhere else. Now life has raised the question of whether we should leave the city. We will not be able to last out in the ruined city with no firewood throughout next winter, even if we survived to see it. During the past winter tens, if not hundreds of thousands of people wasted with hunger have caught their death of cold in their unheated rooms. To wait for such a prospect with philosophical calm is senseless. So we must make the decision on whether to leave Leningrad. But where would we go? And what about the Archives?"

"And suddenly the future looms ahead like a cheerless grey wall, and I can no longer ignore it.

"I didn't get to work today because my wheel-chair was out of order

and because of the weakness of M.F., who could not possibly cope with her duties as mechanic and chauffeur.

"I spent the whole day reading the poetry of Baudelaire, Verlaine and others...

"15.3.42. Day 267. It's my birthday today. I am 55... I am tired, exhausted by hunger and cold, tortured by moral considerations, crushed by the maelstrom of events. But I am not an old man, am not a back number. I still feel I have sufficient strength within me to fight, and if necessary to die... What else is there to do! I've lived my life. True, I could have done with another three or five years in peace, to occupy myself with my books, my collections, my unfinished plans... Evil times have come, the whole world, our whole planet is enveloped in fiery flames.

"I got up early. Dressed by the stove. What joy it is to warm oneself by a hot stove in a freezing cold room. It was lit up for the night and had still not cooled down by morning. I'm now sitting at the table. True, the room is a mess. The heated *burzhuika* gives off acrid smoke that stings the eyes... But what happiness it is to have M.F. by my side. She does her best to keep her spirits up. Right now she's making coffee. My hands may be freezing, and she and I both sitting here in our winter coats (it's 19 degrees below zero outside!), but the main thing's that we're alive. And we love each other...

" 'Kichi (that's what I call my true friend and wife, M.F.), my dear, come to me...'

"And I kiss her, so thin, so aged... She smiles at me with radiant eyes, clear, tender, loving eyes.

" 'My joy, my support, my friend, my faithful wife...'

"I don't finish, I think to myself: 'Could it be that our lives are over, could it be that this is the end?' I drive away such thoughts, for they're not what we need...

"We sit down to drink our coffee. I warm M.F.'s hands. On my table lie Petrarch, Verhaeren, Alexander Blok... What an infinity of thoughts and images!

"We're still alive! "

Books meant a great deal during the Leningrad blockade, and they accomplished a great deal. Leningrad is a city crammed with books, with collections of books—state, institute and personal libraries. It could, perhaps, have been first in the country for the number of books per citizen. And, furthermore, first-class rare books have been collected, early editions. Leningrad was renowned for its antiquarian bookshops. Before the war many buildings in Liteiny Prospekt, or, rather, their ground floors, were occupied by bookshops. Along the park railings was a whole second-hand book market. And nearby streets—Belinsky, for instance, were also occupied by bookshops. Here you could find anything, or virtually anything—old French novels, pamphlets from the early years of the revolution, church books, technical reference works in German. Second-hand booksellers in felt boots and thick coats, would clap their

mittened hands to warm them as they walked along the rows of stalls heaped with books, where book lovers were rummaging.

Books suffered terribly because of the blockade. They were lost in fires, they were destroyed by bombing and, lastly, people fed them into *burzhuikas*, into stoves. They used them for kindling, to warm themselves, and for that it was impossible to blame anyone. But people also rescued books, saved them. There's a wonderful story about the staff of the Public Library, who in the most hungry, desperate time somehow managed to bring to the repository the private collections of dead owners, scholars, bibliophiles, and saved books from bombed houses. They lugged them on sledges, handcarts, and on their own backs, from one end of the city to the other, to the repository of the Public Library. No one forced them to do it, there was no order to that effect, no material encouragement was offered for such work. They simply loved and treasured books, and that was why they saved them.

Those were professional librarians, but there were also ordinary Leningraders, old St Petersburgers, the descendants of the old St Petersburg intelligentsia.

Here is a story we heard from *Zinaida Ignatovich*, who worked at the food hygiene research laboratories and was head of a department there. Up to the revolution her life was typical enough for a girl who was seeking meaningful work for the benefit of the people: she came to St Petersburg from a faraway province, entered the Women's Medical Institute, and, during an epidemic of cholera and later of typhus, went to work in the most seriously hit areas... She was a modest, cultural woman with



In the Saltykov-Schedrin Public Library.

genuinely high ideals. The episode she speaks of is a typical Leningrad story.

"There were the two of us, my husband and I, in the blockade. He was emaciated, and in 1942 had to stop working. But he was a passionate booklover. My cousin was a professor, and in October, through much effort, she had somehow managed to be evacuated to the 'mainland'. As she left she told me: 'I've abandoned all my things. If you have a chance stop by to see what's there, for I couldn't bring anything away with me.' Leningrad had a late spring in 1942, and snow wouldn't melt well into April. At last the days grew longer and I said to my husband: 'Let's go to Vera's place and have a look there.' The apartment we lived in was empty, for all the neighbours had been evacuated. One of them, an engineer, had died, and his wife was at the front. There were five rooms and just the two of us living there, no one else. We tied two sledges together and dragged them off. My cousin lived by the Field of Mars, and to get there we had to go across the Neva, past the Stock Exchange, covering a distance of some two kilometres. We walked slowly, and had got as far as the Stock Exchange when the most frightful bombardment began, with shells falling in the water and right by the Stock Exchange. I said: 'Let's walk round the Exchange, it's quieter there.'

"At last we reached Vera's flat. Well, the flat was open, and there were no things there, of course, except for untouched bookcases, complete with books. My husband brightened up. 'Look, the books are safe! I'll take them.' Realising how weak he was, I said: 'You know what? Take only the most interesting ones, we hardly managed to get here with empty sledges.' But when he'd made his selection the sledges were full, both of them piled high. 'You mean we're taking all those books?' I asked. And my husband answered: 'I couldn't leave Dostoevsky! If we leave those books, someone might burn them!' So we set off with the sledges. We crossed the Neva by the Stock Exchange, and another bombardment started. I said: 'Let's go round the building again.' As we were turning I looked round and saw him suddenly pale, and in an instant he had fallen! And the chief thing I remember now, and, mind you, we had lived together for many years, and lived happily, is that first thought I had when I saw him falling. It wasn't that he had died, that I had lost him, but how I was going to get him home! Even now I remember that feeling! I was anguished, but it was not because I thought he had died, but because I didn't know how I was going to drag his body home! Well, I slowly dragged him up the stairs of the Stock Exchange, and laid him down. Then I felt for his pulse, and it was still beating, though feebly. Can you imagine that! He sat there for an hour, coming to. Well, of course, there was no question of his pulling a sledge. Nor could we abandon the books. On we went. He leaned heavily on my arm, and I also pulled those two sledges laden with books. It probably took us about three hours to get back home. The lift didn't work, and I couldn't possibly lug those books upstairs. We left the sledges downstairs, and it was as much as I could do to drag my husband up to the flat. The next day he could not get up. I

left him some food, and walked off to the Institute."

"Do you mean you left the sledges with the books where they were?"

"Yes, right there. When I arrived back from work I saw that the sledges were empty! How terrible, I thought, a man almost died because of those books, and then someone took them for firewood! I started climbing the stairs to the fourth floor, where our flat was. When I reached the floor below ours, I heard some queer sounds, as if a dog was making a kind of shuffling noise with its paws! But it couldn't possibly have been a dog, there were none left in 1942! All the dogs had been eaten long before that. When I got to the third floor landing I saw the following sight: my husband, with a sack of books on his back, was dragging them up on all fours! When he saw me he sat down and said: 'So I didn't get it done in time. I meant to finish the job before you came home.' He was no longer able to go any further, so I pulled him up a whole flight of stairs, then into the room, and laid him down. He was too weak to stand. So he had crawled on all fours, like a dog, to get those books upstairs."

For us, looking back from our prosperous, well-fed times, it should not, one would think, be difficult to understand, even to share such a love for books. Who of us today wouldn't rush off to pick up some unexpected legacy of books? But to understand and share that particular love for books and that precise feeling, you really have to imagine yourself in the position of the besieged Leningrader, to experience, at least in imagination, his state of extreme emaciation, when all thoughts, apart from the main thought of one's daily bread seemed to have been removed by hunger.

Leningrad intelligentsia... Russian intelligentsia... Attempts are often made to reduce these concepts to a matter of learning and cultivation. But that is not entirely true.

A man on the verge of dying goes for books! How much man is capable of doing! That is why the reminiscences of the blockade are so important to all of us—they reveal a strength of the human spirit that transcends all limits, a potential which in ordinary life remains unrealised.

Spring was approaching, approaching slowly, too slowly. But on the Road of Life no one wanted it; there they were afraid of the warm sunshine and lost no time, while the ice was still strong, to get as much food as possible across the lake to Leningrad, and evacuate as many people as could be got out.

The first to come to life were the children.

A.P. Grishkevich wrote in his diary on 13th March:

"There was the following incident at one of the children's homes in Kuibyshev district. On 12th March all the staff gathered in the boys' room to watch a fight between two children. As the boys subsequently explained, it started over some 'serious question'. Before that there had been 'skirmishes', but only verbal ones, over bread.

"The head of the home, Comrade Vasilieva, said: 'It's the most heart-warming event of the past six months. At first the children remained in their beds, some time later they started quarrelling, and now—something



unheard of—they are fighting. Before the war I would have been removed from my job over a thing like this. But now, we who were responsible for their upbringing, were standing around, watching the fight and rejoicing. It meant that our little people had come to life.’ ”

During these March days of 1942 Georgi Knyazev wrote:

“Soup, steaming hot soup on the table. And we’re greedily smacking our chops, lapping it up like hungry dogs... But beside me there’s a book, brimming with ideas, sparkling, full of content, at times paradoxical and controversial—*On Poetry in the Bible* by V.V., and a pencil for notes. I take from it what I need, what has retained its force and vitality, and the rest I leave, like dross... Soup made from—I don’t even know what it’s made from—tastes like ‘the food of the gods’ to us. The most poetic thing about it is probably the warm steam it gives off.

“M.F. has brought an extra piece of bread, which she had exchanged for a shirt at the market. What happiness it is to still be living! And today the *burzhuika* is not sending out smoke into the room, as it used to. M.F. has cleaned the soot from the flues.

“What else could one wish for? Only one thing—to have some certainty of tomorrow, or even not so far ahead, of this evening. People cannot, in fact, live by the present moment, by the instant, without any future (I speak, of course, of a personal future).

“18.3.42. Day 270 of the war. Today, between one and two in the

afternoon, our Vasilievsky Island was unexpectedly subjected to ferocious bombardment.

"Lost in thought, I was returning from the Archives along the embankment, when suddenly the air above the Neva began to rip like silk. And immediately something, somewhere, started thundering. Ahead of me passersby were already lying flat in the snow. It was all staggeringly unexpected... This morning, as I opened the front entrance door and walked out, while M.F. was standing by the columns, preparing the wheelchair for me, I had thought: what blissful peace and quiet, the guns are not barking.

"And suddenly... One shell whistled overhead, then a second, a third... And rat-tat-tat-tat! Explosions somewhere nearby. Those who were not prone were running, bent double, along the house walls. It was too risky to stay in the middle of the street. I turned from the embankment into the gates of the former Cadet Corps and the guard let me pass. I waited there between thirty and forty minutes, for as long as the firing went on. Then, without waiting for complete calm, I drove out onto the embankment. Academician Krachkovsky was standing in the entrance to the former Menshikov Palace, white-faced, tense, silent and proud... Once again the firing became more intense. He walked a few paces with me in silence, absorbed in thought, and then again halted, but this time round the corner of the house.

"All this time M.F. was sitting in the canteen in the basement of the Zoological Museum. I was more or less confident about her safety... But it turned out to have been misplaced confidence. A shell fell right between the Otto Hospital and the Academy's canteen. The deafening blow of the blast wave broke all the windows there... And M.F. was sitting at one of the windows. Shrapnel, shell and glass fragments flew just over her head. They did not injure her, but the terrible force of the blast deafened her right ear. There was general turmoil... M.F.'s first thought was about me, for she knew I was travelling along the embankment, right in the line of fire... But fortunately she did not rush out but stayed until all was quiet, and finally got her dinner—they had ceased to serve meals during the confusion...

"31.3.42. Day 283. With what love and tenderness I looked at my art collections, at the extracts for the history of culture, and at literary works either begun or merely conceived... I only need another few years, well, perhaps three, that's all!

"M.F. came up to me and asked, smiling: 'Still writing?' She reminded me of a story about a man who scribbled something on paper with relish, inspired by the fortunate circumstance that he had written everything he wanted to and in the way he desired. But when they looked to see what he was writing they could make neither head nor tail of it: all they saw were lines of hooks and loops which did not resemble a single letter, or simply lines drawn across the page. And the lucky man was in a state of bliss—he had had time to write everything he wanted to...

"We both laughed.

" 'You keep an eye on me,' I told M.F.

"We laughed again. It's rare that people laugh nowadays.

“ ‘Will we last out?’ M.F. asked.

“ ‘We’ll hang on through April and May, and in June or July we’ll go away.’

“ ‘And suppose we don’t manage to get away?’

“We were both silent.”

Here is another story about books in Georgi Knyazev’s diary. A researcher at the Pulkovo Observatory told him about *Victor Berg*.

“Incidentally, he travelled to Pulkovo by lorry in the winter to get from the cellars books that had been left there, and among them some very valuable incunabula. This was done right under the enemy’s nose, one and a half kilometres away from him. During the journey they had to jump for their lives into the ditch, and luckily the shells were blasting along the other side of the road. The cellars, where the valuable library of the Pulkovo Observatory was kept, were vaulted, and so solidly built that they were thought to be completely bomb-proof. In one part there was even a doubly isolated cellar for the time service. Yet it had all been ruined. The books had got jumbled. Having reached Pulkovo by army lorries at the risk of his life, Berg, in pitch darkness, selected the most valuable books, and these were later brought back from there. Another staff member, Zimmerman, participated in rescuing another part of the library.

“When our Archives were under threat, I had a talk with Shafranovsky, senior librarian at the Academy of Sciences Library. The smoke from a fire we were observing from the window turned out to be to the left of the library. ‘I hope it’s not the house I live in that’s burning,’ he said thoughtfully. ‘Is there anyone of your family at home?’ ‘My daughter, she’s fifteen.’ ‘And who else?’ ‘No one else... When I was demobilised and came home my wife and my mother were not there. They had died at the beginning of this year... There was only my daughter to greet me. Now the two of us live together, but she’s only a child and that makes keeping house very difficult...’ I could not help saying: ‘Why didn’t you tell me about it when you were at my place?’ ‘Why should I? I’m not the only one with troubles...’ Gunfire rolled above us, and we heard bombs exploding nearby and in the distance. I suggested we move into one of our rooms in the tower. He smiled, and simply said: ‘What for?’ We resumed our talk on business matters, about further plans for inspecting the Academy’s repositories...”

Another person who saved books during the blockade was *Maria Moshkova*, a member of the staff at the Public Library. With her colleagues she carried off whatever remained of the bombed book collections—on her back, on a sledge, in sacks. They went to well-known bibliophiles and scholars, to addresses they knew or were notified of by relatives and friends, climbing up from one floor to the next, gathering books and

taking them to the book repository of the Public Library. Later a car was allocated to them, but in the most difficult months these emaciated women slowly lugged heavy bundles of books through the city.

Blockade survivors recall how books were printed and published, they remember the shows at the Musical Comedy Theatre, the exhibitions, the performance of Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony at the Philharmonia. Of the latter, *Nil Belyaev*, a musician, tells this story:

"It was a very special occasion when they played that symphony. Shostakovich had been witness to a great human disaster, to all the deprivations and sufferings of the people. And not only Shostakovich, but also the members of the orchestra, the conductor, and the people in the audience had all been participants in and witnesses to tragedy. That is why our response to the symphony was unusually strong. You understand? Later I had the opportunity to listen to this symphony in a splendid rendering, with a good orchestra and a wonderful conductor, but there could never be the same impression from that music, never that very personal perception of it as then, a perception special to that time, when you knew that sitting in the orchestra were your half-starved comrades and that Karl Eliasberg, too, was not a particularly well-fed man. Furthermore, with those comrades we had shared our very worst winter, and the following year, when we'd recovered some of our strength, we were all enrolled in workers' battalions. We were together in those units to the end of the war, defending Leningrad as best we could. For instance, the well-known cellist, Safonov, and I began as fire-fighters, and later on we were in the signals squad."

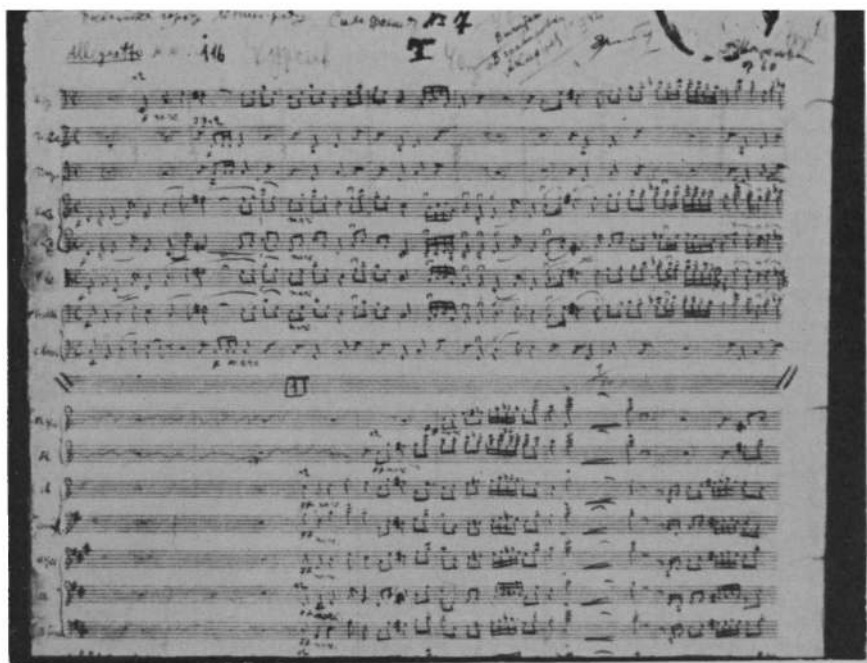
The writer *Gennady Gor* relates:

"Just before war broke out I bought a book by Zimmer on Goethe's philosophy of the individual, written in an abstract way and one of the most difficult books I have ever come across. I tried to read it, but did not understand anything. But during the blockade, reading it by the light of an oil lamp, I discovered its meaning and derived enormous intellectual satisfaction from it. Later, when things were quite terrible, the life of the intellect froze. People began to live by the moment. The past seemed to have vanished. There remained only the present, and that made life somewhat easier. Our lives became fragmented—we warmed ourselves, drank, ate, waited for dinner..."

A man of keen vision, Gennady Gor made subtle observations on the shift in man's sense perceptions at that time. For example, how one's idea of distances changed:

"Everything became a long distance away. Streets visibly widened, and became much longer. No doubt it was due to our weakness, and on top of that to the deserted streets."

"How do you think Leningraders displayed their spiritual strength at that time?"



*The first page of the original score
for Dmitri Shostakovich's Seventh (Leningrad) Symphony.*

“By not panicking, not losing their heads. There were few cases of hysterics, of people shrieking and raving. In general I am against the word ‘heroism’ in such conditions. There was self-control, there was dignity, even in death. There was optimism, not personal hope, but a general optimistic mood. Altogether the national character combined with a high level of culture in Leningrad...”

Really astonishing things took place there. Leningraders even marked the day of Pushkin's birth! In 1943! This episode cropped up quite by chance in a talk with *Vera Bezobrazova*.

During and after the war she lived in Moika Street, next door to the Pushkin House-Museum. The museum was, of course, closed, but then somebody—who, she does not remember, began going round the house she lived in, inviting people to come to a celebration.

“We were invited in advance and were given little tickets. There were about eight of us living in the house.”

“It was probably difficult to gather people from all over the city, and so only those who lived on the spot were invited?”

“That's right, the people who lived there. They came to us and said: come along tomorrow, there'll be a celebration for the anniversary of Pushkin's birth. That was in 1943, on the sixth of June. Who was there?”

There was Vsevolod Vishnevsky, who made a very good speech, saying that we would win victory and that there would be no more hunger and everything would be as before, everything would be all right. There was Nikolai Tikhonov, too, and Vera Inber. If I'm not mistaken she read us her poem *To the Memory of Pushkin*.^{*} We all stood up. Pushkin's bust was adorned with a wreath made for the occasion. We all honoured this date."

"Were you in the museum itself?"

"Yes, we were. It was a festive occasion, you know. Vsevolod Vishnevsky assured us with such conviction: 'Believe me, we'll win victory!'"

"Was he addressing the eight of you?"

"Yes, the eight of us. But what Nikolai Tikhonov said, I can't remember now."

"What did the place look like then?"

"All the windows were boarded up. In the courtyard, where the Pushkin monument stands, a bomb had fallen, and there was an enormous hole. But in our house it only made the crockery rattle. None of us was really hurt."

"Was the monument there at that time?"

"No, it was erected a long time after that, after Victory. And the stables survived. One day a visitor asked me: 'What's that building?' I told him: 'Those were the stables belonging to Biron, Anna Ioannovna's favourite.' He remarked: 'How interesting—they're still standing, while my garage has been destroyed.' But on the whole Pushkin House suffered very little damage. And over there, opposite our house, a big bomb fell right into the Moika, but it did not explode."

There were stories of a different kind, but equally characteristic and astonishing, bearing witness to man's creative potential. Boris Shelishch served as a lieutenant in a barrage balloon regiment. He recalls:

"We had no fuel. In order to get a balloon down to refill it with hydrogen, we had to switch on the motor engines, but there was no petrol. Mind you, there were hundreds of balloons above the city, preventing the fascist planes from flying lower, from going into a dive, or performing precision bombing. We tried getting them down by hand (there were still some men in the city in September 1941), but a ten-man team could not bring them down. So military operations with captive balloons ceased: with time the hydrogen becomes heavier, the balloon loses its altitude of 3,000-4,000 metres and hangs low, presenting no barrier to planes. So the question was what to do next? It entered my mind that we could get the balloons down with a rope drum. I secured such a drum and brought it to the site, but by then the city was no longer supplied with electricity. Then I remembered Jules Verne's *The Mysterious Island*. I recalled the chapter on 'fuel of the future' from my childhood. I got a copy of the book and re-read it. It was written there that when there was no more coal left, people would start using water as a fuel. How? To

^{*} Probably V.P. Bezobrazova is thinking of Vera Inber's *Pushkin Lives*, written on June 5th, 1943.

utilize it, water had to be broken down into its components, hydrogen and oxygen. I thought, hasn't the time come now? After all, what had we been doing? We had been deflating the envelope of the balloon, thereby expelling the hydrogen which was no longer fit for use, and that was tantamount to spilling a barrel of petrol on the ground. I thought: this polluted hydrogen I have at hand is ready-made fuel. The very same fuel that Jules Verne wrote of.

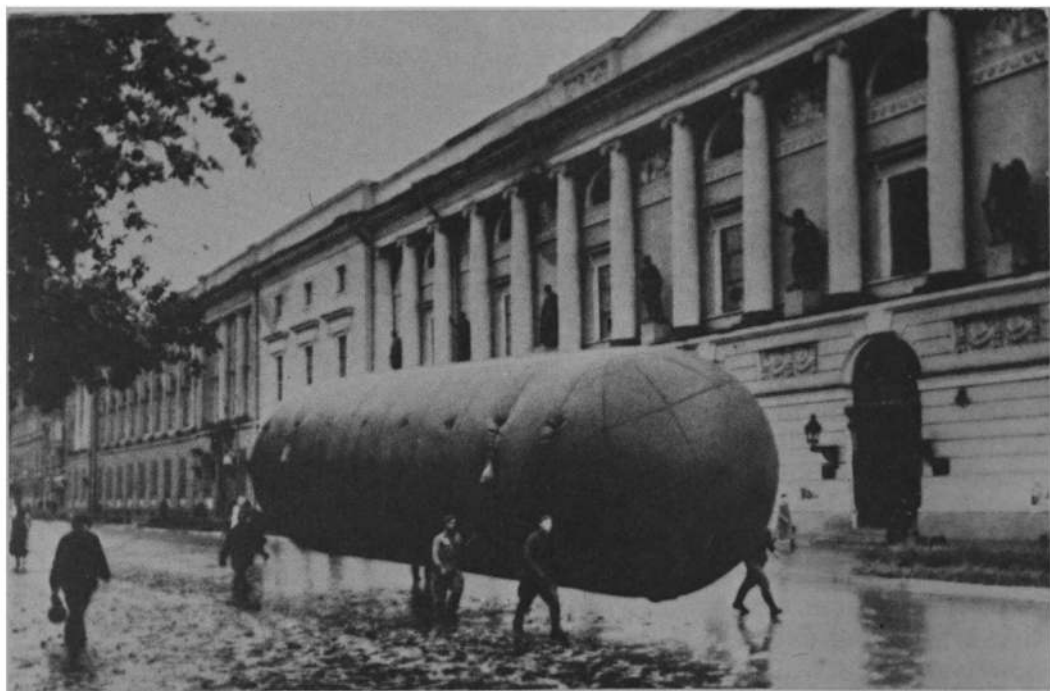
"I got my commander's consent. My idea was very simple—to thrust the hose of the balloon's envelope into the suction pipe of the engine. I felt the engine coming to life. I revved up, and it picked up speed. Then suddenly—an emergence. It backfired. A flash, an explosion and the gas-holder was burning. I had concussion. I almost gave up, but there was no petrol and something had to be done about it. Then I realised that I had to invent something to stop the backfiring. The chair had to be broken automatically, and there could be nothing better for that than water. I took a fire extinguisher and mounted a waterlock in it. The engine would suck in hydrogen through the water and it would not backfire.

I was given permission to try it out. The generals came. They looked at how the engine worked and gave their approval. Then they gave orders that within ten days all balloon rope drums were to be converted for the new type of fuel. We collected fire extinguishers from all over the city. We had to get 600 of them. We obtained hoses. In short, all the balloons started operating on the new fuel, on hydrogen. They worked better than on petrol and I can tell you why. Because in the cold the engine starts badly on petrol. It has to be warmed up first. On hydrogen it starts even in frost with half a rev."

Engines working on hydrogen fuel were demonstrated at an exhibition of the Leningrad Front. Boris Shelishch perfected his design and later he was sent to Moscow, where he discussed it with experts:

"If there had been petrol available I would never have taken my idea to its conclusion. And in general, I can tell you that a great many things would never have entered my head had it not been for the blockade. You know, in those years I re-read the story of the Chelyuskin expedition—about how they settled on the ice, how they lived in such conditions. I thought that perhaps it would be possible to extract something useful from their experience. After all, we too were living, you might say, on an iceberg. I don't remember ever working with such energy and ingenuity in normal, peaceful conditions. And, generally speaking, I did not think I would ever have a full stomach again."

On the radio, perhaps at that very time, people heard these lines that were strange and yet so understandable to the blockaded Leningraders:



*In mire and mirk, in hunger and in grieving,
where death, like a shadow, followed at our heels,
we often then had such a happy feeling,
and with such blissful freedom we were breathing,
that all our grandsons well may envy feel.*

Knyazev's radio, we remember, was out of order and remained silent. How would he have taken these lines from *A February Diary* by Olga Bergholtz? How well they expressed everything that Knyazev had experienced and had written of in his diary—that hungry excitement which many felt and remember (a state which in some was later to be replaced—but not in Knyazev's case—by apathy and total indifference), that ecstasy at everything life can still give to a man (even during a blockade). And it did indeed have a lot to give to a person with a life-long dedication to culture, who was coming to love and value Leningrad and poetry with renewed vigour, who was learning to understand people facing a most difficult task—to defend and save the humanist past and future of mankind.

From Georgi Knyazev's diary:

"Had a talk with V.A. Petrov, who is on the staff of the IHMC.* He told me: 'At the end of January, when I lost my wife and daughter, when my flat was bombed, the books (I have a specialised library of about

* IHMC—Institute of the History of Material Culture.

6,000 volumes) lay about, thrown by blast from the bookcases onto the floor, and furniture, clothing and linen were all ruined. I stood in the cold, devastated room in a stupor, with the beginnings of pneumonia, and I don't know myself where I found the strength within me to order myself to live and to finish the works I had begun. I was on the verge of dying then, with a life reduced to naught, but I suddenly began to come alive again. And I go on living. I overcame everything. Now I am alone, I have nobody and I have nothing. Nothing apart from the few things that were not ruined in January—this coat, hat, jacket and underwear... That's all I have. When I moved over to live at the library, before it had finally frozen up, I found I also had a reserve of clean collars there.'

"Now he is writing, finishing the works he has started.

" 'True enough, I have forgotten how to laugh,' he says, 'but I have not cried, nor shall I cry.' "

"YOU WILL NOT SET MY LAND ATREMBLE..."

For Leningraders the days of war were also days of blockade, and yet again days of shelling and bombing. Two hundred and ninety, three hundred, three hundred and thirty... Georgi Knyazev kept scrupulous count of them, as did Polzikova-Rubets, a teacher, and Party worker Grishkevich, and dozens of others, whose diaries reached us. Spring, and then summer 1942 brought a noticeable easing of life for the city's residents. Above all came warmth and sunshine. That ferocious enemy, frost, vanished from the scene. People could warm themselves without worrying about firewood, they could even wash themselves a little.

They removed quilts, carpets and mattresses from windows which they had used throughout the winter to protect themselves from the cold, and opened the boarded up ventilation windows. Sunlight streamed into the gloomy, smoke-blackened blockade homes. The parquet flooring had been ripped out, the furniture chopped up, filth was everywhere, but the rays of the sun were like a caress to those people who had seen such suffering. The long winter of oppressive gloom was over for those who had survived. They would come up to the mirror, look at their unrecognisable reflection and feel horrified at what they saw. And that horror, fear and disgust also represented a vivifying sense of awakening. Everyone who kept a diary wrote of this feeling.

And immediately demanding responsibilities were placed upon all citizens, without exception, without allowances for the weak or the dystrophic: the city had to be cleaned up, the corpses removed from empty flats, the accumulations of filth removed, the streets, courtyards and staircases cleared.

In November 1942, as she recalls that spring work, K.V. Polzikova-Rubets is amazed. How did we manage it? How were we able to do it? In her astonishment she writes in the third person, as if from outside things.

"It was unbelievable that they cleared away the heaps of muck with which Leningrad was covered (I also took part in this work). They adorned the city with a carpet of vegetable plots, toiled from sunrise until they had to go to work at factories and offices, then toiled after work was over. And that was without water supply, without a sewage system operating, without laundries, virtually without bath-houses, on semi-starvation rations and to the whine of enemy shells. Leningraders protected their vegetable plots, keeping guard at night. And those who stole the vegetables raised with such difficulty from under their very noses, were also Leningraders..."

Anatoly Boldyrev continues his story about evacuation from Leningrad, now taking place in spring conditions:

"Preparations for navigation in 1942 were just as difficult as the organisation of the ice road had been. Leningraders had only the pitiful remnants of a fleet available. There were no barges, no landing stages, no tugs—everything had been destroyed. Six-hundred-tonne metal barges had to be built. All the city Party committee officials were engaged in organising this work. The barges were made in sections at the factories and transported to the bay by rail. Beyond Lake Ladoga, in the forest reserve, timber was prepared for wooden barges just as it used to be in Peter the Great's time. In a temporary shipyard 33 barges were built. The remnants of the fleet were repaired. It was harrowing work because there was constant bombing of all the approaches to the shipyards, to the moorings and the piers. Dozens of people were killed. But thanks to the persistence of Leningraders, to the constant reinforcements, the programme was fulfilled... Altogether in the 1942 navigation season over a million tonnes of cargo of various kinds was transported to and from Leningrad."

On Georgi Knyazev's small radius there was also warmth, green grass and the first spring flowers.

"18.5.42. Day 331. It's a lovely day. Along the embankment they're digging a bed for flowers, the one about which I wrote with such sad hopelessness in the autumn. I did not think that I'd live to see that bed burst forth into flower again. How moved I am at the sight of that long strip of black earth newly dug for planting.

"In Rummyantsev Garden the people of Vasilievsky Island have laid out vegetable plots, dividing the area into sections. Unfortunately, trenches of the air raid shelters take up a lot of room.

"It's hot in the sunshine. How good to sit and warm oneself, to enjoy life! Now I so much want to live, to think, to create...

"Today after a six-month break, I have been working in my own room again, at my desk—and I could hardly believe it..."

By July it became clear that the Knyazevs had to leave the city. But Georgi Knyazev chased away the thought:

"6.7.42. Day 380. The city is full of frightful rumours. Everybody is expecting a German offensive on Leningrad, its complete encirclement and all the horrors of a new blockade, a blockade to the death, strangling the people of Leningrad.

"Women and children walk through the streets pushing prams loaded with their possessions. Their evacuation is obligatory. A doctor living next door has sent his wife and two children off to Bashkiria. Red-faced and sweating, he pushed a pram with their belongings, while the mother, with a child in her arms and another tottering by her side, walked with an unsteady, tired gait.

"At workplaces lists of those to be evacuated are being drawn up. Scholars are handing in their manuscripts to the Archives.

"I've summoned up strength and face the future with the utmost calm...

"I was told that a telegram had arrived from Fanya, our cleaning woman and the wife of our stoker, Urmancheyev, the mother of three children. She wrote that she had reached her home, but of her three children only one survived the journey—the two others had died on the way.

"My own beloved city, where not only streets, squares and houses are familiar, every cobblestone is known to me! It breaks my heart to look at it now.



“ ‘ There’s Nevsky Prospekt... There’s Morskaya Street,’ I wrote in the days of the first blockade, during the Civil War, when I had been struck by the destruction in the city and its emptiness. Only a pack of dogs could be then seen from time to time in the deserted streets; towards evening, when there were no pedestrians, they would sometimes even tear along Nevsky Prospekt. Today you won’t find a single dog in the streets.

“And now here again are Nevsky and Morskaya... A bomb has done something frightful in former Malaya Morskaya, now Gogol Street, slicing off the whole corner block, from the roof to the foundation... Closed and boarded up shops, buildings, damaged by artillery fire and entirely or partly unoccupied. The city lies in ruins once again. I am experiencing the same thing a second time. And today, as twenty or so years ago, I was numbed with grief, almost in despair... But I comforted myself—after all the city recovered from that devastation, and it will recover again! My beloved city will live and prosper. The days of this terrible war will pass, and the city will remain for years to come... We shall die, but the city will remain. The city of Peter the Great and Lenin, two geniuses of the Russian people, will never die. Through St Petersburg Peter the Great acquired access for Russia to Western Europe, and in Lenin’s time the city became the symbol of the Revolution for Europe and the whole world.

“Ten years after my verse about devastated Leningrad I felt I had to write another one which I called *How Could I Ever Doubt*... Yes, I became ashamed later on that I didn’t have enough faith. That time Leningrad rose from the ruins. It will rise now, too, when this war ends... These thoughts I am recording at home but there, on Nevsky Prospekt, on Morskaya, on Profsoyuzny Boulevard, I confess that I thought differently. I suddenly gave way to despair, and it took a lot of reason and willpower to overcome it...”

“There is this one question that haunts me,” Knyazev writes. “Have I the right to leave the Archives, or my ‘ship’, as I call it.”

“If I am doomed to die, I would like to die with it. But it turns out that I shall leave the Archives.

“ ‘You are being ordered to do that,’ Comrade Fedoseyev told me, ‘and it is your duty to obey.’

“I have asked for a delay till Monday so that I can give the matter careful consideration. What answer will I give? An agonising question. I turned to M.F. She replied in writing... She is sincere and straightforward. We must leave! I walked around the Archives, feeling sick at heart. Do I have the right to abandon the Archives? Am I not then a deserter?

“...My home city, I too am forced to leave you. Today I should have been packing, instead of which, pencil in hand, I have been scribbling down page after page. I don’t want to be reproached for not taking my duties seriously and leaving out part of what I saw, heard, read and went through in the days of the siege of my wonderful city. I am carrying out my duty to the best of my ability. I will be taking with me a briefcase stuffed full of notes on the Leningrad blockade...

“11.8.42. Day 416 of the war. My last day in Leningrad.

“I have been taking my leave of the city. Bidding farewell to the



The sign says: "Slow speed! Danger—unexploded bomb! "

sphinxes... The embankment was deserted. In the morning, on my way to the Academy, I met only three people—an army man and two women, bearing a coffin on their shoulders... At work, as I was walking round the repositories, there was a deep sinking feeling in my heart. Was I leaving them temporarily or for good? At home there is a great commotion. It's 4 p.m. but there are lots of things still to be packed. At 7 p.m. the bus will come to collect us and our belongings! "

This is where the day-to-day notes titled "In Beleaguered Leningrad" end. Consequent to that was evacuation full of hardship for the emaciated man with a paralysed leg and his devoted wife, and, following that, a return to Leningrad, to his work at the Archives.

Knyazev died in that same house with the windows overlooking the Neva River and the sphinxes, with the 27 memorial plaques listing the names of prominent St Petersburgers, Petrograders and Leningraders on its outside walls.

Amongst the photographs in Maria Knyazeva's family album we saw a postwar photo of a group of people who worked at the Archives of the USSR Academy of Sciences. These were Georgi Knyazev's new and old colleagues. "The old ones", those who had survived the blockade, bear no distinguishing marks. You may sometimes be able to recognise them, but never for certain. Yet you would expect to be able to tell from their faces, read from their eyes that these were blockade survivors, people who had lived through the blockade, who knew what it had been like!



*Staff-members of the Academy of Sciences Archives, 1947.
(Knyazev is second to the right in the lower row.)*

When Alexander Chernikov mentioned names familiar to us through Knyazev's notes, there was much that did not seem to fit. Could it be that this man, so full of confidence, so even-tempered, is the one who "was always in tears"? That pretty, plump woman—could she have looked like "a bedraggled hungry cat"? This skinny woman and that one over there—you would hardly have given her a second glance—had the two of them, barely alive themselves, really lugged that fortunate-looking man, then suffering from "complete malnutrition", right across the city on a sledge?

The survivors of the blockade are now walking about the city unnoticed: we cannot point them out (only occasionally we may be able to tell by their age or by their looks), yet they see us...

Here is one woman's voice out of the hundreds we taped:

"I have bought me a small house outside Novgorod, an oldish one. It feels good to have a house all my own. I bought it when I was still working... I get up every morning with a clear soul, having no grudges against anyone! No one bothers to tell me what to do. I am free to go wherever I wish. Where did I go today? First I went to the church on the Field of Mars, then went to the Cathedral of Our Saviour by the Griboyedov Canal. Stood in front of the hospital where my boy had died. Stood by the Kazansky Cathedral where my sister had died, leaving a child. Then walked along Nevsky Prospekt. On the way I looked into everyone's eyes in the hope of spotting someone I knew. All I saw was people carrying huge string bags full of oranges. I walked on..."

She walks on, among a crowd of people, and it is impossible to distinguish her from the rest. There are fewer and fewer blockade survivors left. Nowadays you hear their stories less frequently. They already have grown-up grandchildren, who were born many years after the war and have never in their lives seen a house wrecked by a bomb. Houses have been restored, pillboxes removed, shell marks on the walls plastered over. Schoolchildren learn about the past war from visits to the city museum. There are two special halls devoted to the blockade: it has gone down in history along with Narodnaya Volya (the People's Will), the Revolution, the Civil War, the construction of the Metro, and the new built-up areas on the city's outskirts.

The children of those who had survived the blockade still remember what it had been like. But even they often enough do not know the details, the particulars of their own life in besieged Leningrad.

LIFE MUST GO ON

We came upon Yura Ryabinkin's original diary when we had already completed our work on this book. Up till then we had used a retyped copy given to us by Alla Belyakova.

We saw this notebook with a black cloth cover, the entries written in a nice flowing hand in blue ink. Towards the end of the diary Yura tried to squeeze in as much as he could on every page, not bothering about paragraphs. In places there were photographs glued in, and also some ration cards—although the coupons had been torn off, or maybe had just got detached. Now the diary has many blank spaces with remains of whatever was glued to the paper. These notes have been through very many hands. Part of the diary has been damaged by fire. The interval between the lines decreases towards the end as if the writer were trying to use every inch of space. One feels that he dreads to finish this notebook... The first date in the diary is 22nd June 1941, and the last 6th January 1942. By some strange coincidence his last entry is on the last page—the last day in the life of Yura Ryabinkin. His premonition came true.

Yura Ryabinkin's diary is complete, and so is Knyazev's. Lydia Okhapkina's notes on the blockade are also finished.

Our work on the second part of this book came to an end, but we held things up a little. We wanted to find out more about Yura Ryabinkin, though we did not know precisely what. A very even handwriting, from beginning to end. What did this boy, to whom we had become attached through his diaries, look like after all?

How had it all started? The first person to "discover" the diary in 1970 had been Alla Belyakova, a newspaper editor. A woman who had kept the diary for many years brought it into the Leningrad office of a youth newspaper called *Smena*. Alla Belyakova, an experienced journalist, sensed the importance of this document and published an extensive extract from it in *Smena*. She even took the trouble to track down

Yura's classmates in an attempt to find out more about the fate of this boy.

After the first part of the book was published, Alla Belyakova handed over to us the typewritten text of the diary, which at that point had not yet been fully deciphered. The diary posed a number of questions: what happened to Yura, to his mother and his sister Ira? The house where he used to live has long since been converted into offices, so none of his neighbours could have remained there. Consequently, there seemed to be no plausible explanation of how the diary had survived. Maybe there was a second part to it. Unfortunately the name and address of the woman who had brought the diary to the newspaper had been lost.

We broadcasted a request over the radio, asking people who might know anything about Yura Ryabinkin to come forward. Among the letters sent in reply there was one from Tatyana Ulanova. Her maiden name was Trifonova, and it turned out that the Trifonov family had preserved Yura Ryabinkin's diary all those years. She wrote:

"My parents did not want to part with the diary—they were afraid it might get lost. The diary meant a great deal to my parents—during the war my father had been on the Volkhov Front and my mother had lived through the blockade herself—she was only two years older than Yura. My mother's father, her sister and her nephews had all died of hunger... That is why Yura's diary was so dear to them. But I convinced them to give it away, and that is how the diary came to have a new lease of life... Maybe it sounds funny but I was really overwhelmed to hear your broadcast. I was also a bit embarrassed, because I had unintentionally misled the correspondent who came to visit our school. I did not really remember where the diary had come from, and said that Yura had passed it on to us. In fact it wasn't quite like that. My grandmother, Rebecca Trifonova, was working at a TB hospital as a visiting nurse. Once she had to bring a dying country teacher from the village of Klipunovo of Lezhsky district to the hospital (this was in 1942, not far from Vologda.—A.A., D.G.). The teacher's wife gave her the diary to read while they were travelling. The teacher was unable to speak by then and died in hospital. So the diary remained in grandmother's possession. How the teacher had come by it his wife had no idea. My grandmother thinks that Yura was probably evacuated from Leningrad and brought to a childcare centre in Lezhsky district. Most likely he died there as did many of those who were brought from Leningrad on the verge of dying. Maybe these are only minor details, but I simply wanted to correct the misunderstanding I had introduced into the history of the diary.

"I remember my father saying that there were two notebooks, but the second one disappeared long ago. Either somebody 'forgot' to return it after reading it (my parents read and re-read the diary many times themselves and lent it to other people), or possibly it was lost on one of the numerous occasions we moved house. At first my grandmother kept the diary in Vologda, and afterwards it came to our family in Leningrad... That is all I know."

We wrote to the Trifonov family in Vologda, and their reply bore out what Tatyana Ulanova told us. They knew nothing at all about Yura's life, and had come into possession of his diary by chance. Naturally, we were very interested in the contents of the second notebook. From the letter they sent from Vologda we learned the following:

"About the second notebook. It was an ordinary school exercise book, slightly burnt and with some kind of stains. But it was not really the continuation of the first one. Two or three pages were covered with notes. Just separate, incoherent sentences, with the repetition of the words 'I am hungry, I am hungry, I am dying', scrawled haphazardly over the page in large letters. There were no dates in that diary. I really can't make out how it was lost. That's all Mother knows and is able to tell you."

Even these small details were important to us. We would like to point out that the diary had been read and re-read in the Trifonov family. It was a kind of family relic, this diary of a Leningrad boy who was not even known to them. It must mean that they immediately sensed the diary's spiritual worth. Maybe that was why they had kept it all those years.

Yura himself, however, interested us even more than the diary. What had happened to him? We tried to get in touch with some of his old friends but got no reply from them, and anyway we doubt whether they would know anything. Through some information we received, it seemed that Yura's sister was alive. We began searching for her. Alla Belyakova helped us with it and soon we found out that Ira Ryabinkina was living in Leningrad. She taught Russian literature at school, was married, and had taken her husband's name. We exchanged letters with her, then talked on the phone and, somewhat apprehensively, went to see her.

We had read Yura's diary so many times, had become so much part of the experiences Yura and his family went through that now we were a little fearful. Of what? Were we afraid of being disappointed? Afraid she would be reluctant to recall things? Or did we fear she might not measure up to our expectations? It was strange, surprising that even after forty years there was still something that could be discerned amidst piles of corpses, amidst the common graves of besieged Leningrad. And that there are people in Vologda and here who still remember, for whom events of the past hold a great importance... Those events have left their traces. Every life leaves a trace of some sort. Even this short life, only sixteen years of it, which never really had a chance... But then, what do we mean by saying that Yura's life did not have a chance? How do you decide whether "a life had a chance" or not? Hardly by the number of years one had lived through.

It turned out that Ira, now a small, frail woman, was even more nervous than we were. When she met us she was somewhat tense, almost scared, although we could see they were expecting us—the table had been laid ready for us in their cosy little flat. Ira's husband and their student

daughter looked slightly worried, as if expecting something unpleasant. It was all rather strange. Apart from the natural feelings aroused by memories of the siege, there was something else here.

At first Ira did not want to tell us anything, saying that it was painful for her to stir up oppressive memories and, in general, that she did not want anything published about herself or her brother.

We tried to convince her that Yura Ryabinkin's life and his diary were part of history, that the publication of his diary would be a memorial to him, and, the main thing, that it was very important for the younger readers to know more about the life of a teenager during the blockade... Ira knew all these arguments herself and when she agreed, it was not because we had persuaded her, but for some unaccountable reason... She began her story:

"From Dzerzhinsky Street to the Admiralty—all that is my old familiar neighbourhood. And the Bankovsky and Yusupov Gardens. It was where I grew up. Whenever there's a chance I try to walk through there. We lived at No. 34 Third of July Street, in Flat 2. There was a difference of eight years between me and my brother, so we weren't really close. But I was his only sister. Of course he didn't concern himself with me. Before the war we used to have a daily help. She would cook soup every day for us. Now we don't always have time to cook, but childhood means to me having soup every day. I was in the Yusupov Gardens, playing on the slide with some children, when I heard shouts of 'War!' Everybody started to run... It was a sunny day. 'Molotov's making a speech!' I didn't know who Molotov was. Crowds gathered round the loudspeakers in the streets. I remember that. There was nobody at home. Then Mother came back. Yura seemed to be with his boyfriends most of the time—he was rarely at home. In our flat, there was a corridor, a kitchen, a dining room, a bedroom and another room where Yura lived. The entrance to our section of the house was in the courtyard."

"Do you remember the neighbours, the I.'s?"

"During the war I. used to be the manager of a building trust. His wife Anfisa died after the war. Maria Vasilyevna, our neighbour, told me that. The I.'s did not go into evacuation. The husband was never at home. I remember Anfisa well. She was a handsome young woman. Whether Yura remained with them or not I don't know. I wrote a letter to them to find out how it all had been... The fact was that the last few days Yura stayed in bed, he could not get up. You shouldn't think that I got all the food. Mother shared out the rations, but it was not enough for Yura. He was right to say that Mother used to eat her share first, and perhaps because I was only a little girl then, mine lasted me longer. I remember him lying on the sofa, with his back to us. Everybody hoped to be evacuated, especially in December and January, and there was constant talk about it: 'If only the regional committee... If only we got permission...' And then I remember Mum bringing back warm clothes with her: a pair of padded trousers and a padded jacket for Yura, and two padded caps that looked like flying helmets—one for herself and one for Yura. Next, I remember

Mother, with all her warm clothes on, trying to help Yura to get up from the sofa... Could I have thought then?... I didn't really see how it happened. Then Yura got up. We were occupying the kitchen then. The kitchen was rather large. It had a stove with copper railings round it, and in the corner was a glass container with water. The water used to warm up when the stove was alight. Next to it stood a large chest, the lid of which opened to form a kind of back. I never saw another one like it. You could keep all sorts of things in this chest. Yura got up, leant against the chest, putting his weight on his stick, but he could not make a step. He stood there, bent over, exhausted... I remember that distinctly... I feel guilty all the time, because I'm still alive, while he... I understand that... We had a sledge, and we put the suitcase with the silver cutlery on it. I remember there was Yura's collection of postcards from the Tretyakov Gallery (he had a lot of them, almost a hundred), those we also took with us (later on, at the childcare centre, the boys and girls wheedled them out of me), and there was some clothing, too—we took all that with us. I pushed the sledge. Yura stayed behind... Mum could not sit him on the sledge. She clearly couldn't, and he couldn't walk. Nor could she have pulled him along. I don't know... This was January 1942. We travelled a long time on the train. I remember that it was a goods train. When we were on our way to the Moscow Station, after walking across the Neva, Mum was desperate to go back for him: 'Yura's back there, alone!' I was crying, of course. Almost as soon as we were on board, the train started moving, and off we went. We were on our way to Ladoga. I clearly remember us crossing the lake."

"But how did Yura's diary find its way to Vologda?"

"That's just the question! I received a telegram from my aunt in the Morozov hospital: 'Ira, essential you read *Smena*...' I had a talk with that woman from Vologda when I went there to try to find out something..."

"If Yura had stayed in Leningrad wouldn't the diary have been there, too?"

"The thing is that Vologda used to be a transit point... Oh that diary, especially its last pages: 'I want to live, I want bread'... I remember his temperament. I think he was evacuated from Leningrad. If he felt he had even the slightest chance, he would have survived. Eventually we reached Vologda. So many years have passed, but I still remember that bench on the railway station, and Mum and I sitting on our bundles. When I went to Vologda recently I recognized the place at once... When we arrived we were given a bowl of cooked millet with bits of meat in it, cut into small cubes. A whole bowlful each! Then they gave us coupons, and I remember Mother carrying a loaf. The bread was stolen later that night. At about six o'clock in the morning she was lying there, on that bench, her mouth covered with froth, her eyes closed. She was dead. It happened on January 26th. Aunt Tina said it was of heart failure. The certificate read: 'Antonina Ryabinkina, forty years of age. Cause of death—emaciation.' We had been on the road right up till January 26th. We stopped at some places but didn't stay anywhere long. I was put into a childcare centre, and later into a children's home, where I lived from February 11, 1942 to 1945, and then I returned to Leningrad. Aunt Tina



On the first floor are the windows of Yura Ryabinkin's room.

took me to live with her. The children's home was in a small place called Ozhiga. That's about twenty-one kilometres from Vologda, a four hours' trip now, but then you had to walk all the way through the forest. So Aunt Tina, in her army greatcoat, a knapsack on her back, had walked twenty-one kilometres just to fetch me! She brought me back to Leningrad. We were evacuated from Leningrad on January 8th, and arrived in Vologda on the 26th."

This is roughly what Ira's first incoherent account sounded like, now and again interrupted by tears. Apart from that there was a kind of additional tension, some new and painful sense of apprehension.

We got the impression that Ira was afraid we would think badly of her mother... "I see what you mean, I understand," she would say, afraid we might start asking her questions. What questions could there be? If her mother, Antonina Mikhailovna, died the very night she arrived in Vologda, it meant that her illness, the dystrophic process was irreversible. Food could not help her now. She had left Leningrad a dying woman, completely exhausted, mentally and physically, and only the powerful force of motherhood fanned the fading spark of life. When they finally reached their destination, Vologda, it was all over, she died. The mere fact that she got Ira to Vologda was a miracle of maternal devotion. Only somebody who does not understand the terrible reality of blockade existence, can blame her for not having enough strength to take Yura along. True, it is virtually impossible for a well-fed person to fully

comprehend this reality. "The well-fed can never understand the hungry," says the proverb.

The mind of Yura's mother was already affected by dystrophy, she was dazed and stupefied. The only clear thought in her mind was that she had left Yura, her son, behind! She had probably intended putting her daughter on the train and then going back for her son. She could not get them both to the station at once—Yura would have had to be brought on a sledge, and she did not have the strength for that.

The train had started immediately. But even if it had not, she would probably still have been unable, through weakness, to return for him. She was, as Ira told us, on the brink of death the whole way to Vologda. By this time they had food, but it was too late, she was dying in sorrow, with a heart that was breaking because she had left her son behind. She may have castigated herself for her helplessness. She probably did, but we have no right to do so.

That is what we made of Ira's story, although she herself tried to say as little as possible, fearing to offend the memory of her mother by the mere fact of trying to justify her.

"What I do remember is the kind of things he used to enjoy. He had a draughtsman's table in his room with an ink-pot on it, a green wing chair, and a billiard table in the middle of the room (all the boys used to play billiards non-stop), and he had a set of meccano. I was only eight, and he rarely included me in anything... Sometimes they would settle themselves in the dining room: they would drape something over the table and play under it. Yura would draw maps with oceans and seas (from imagination) on large sheets of cartridge paper. The boys used to come round and play all kind of games. We had a quite substantial library. Yura used to attend the Pioneer Palace, the history and chess clubs there. Academician Tarlé used to tell Mother: 'Your son has a great future. Take good care of him! There were no girls among his friends, but there were two boys—Shtakelberg and Misha Chistov (the Chistovs lived downstairs).'

"Aunt Tina never married. By modern standards she was impractical, not sufficiently pushing. She used to tell me: 'It's one thing what your mother and father are—you yourself have to be somebody, too.'

"We returned to Leningrad in 1945. My aunt lived on the Morozov hospital premises. When I went back to the old flat I saw some of our things there: our volumes of Pushkin, Yura's ink-pot (I still have it) and an old album of photographs. I took these away with me. As for the dressing table and other furniture, I couldn't be bothered with them. I recognised these things, but when I went another time they had all disappeared. I don't know, perhaps Mother had arranged to sell them before we left, I can't tell.

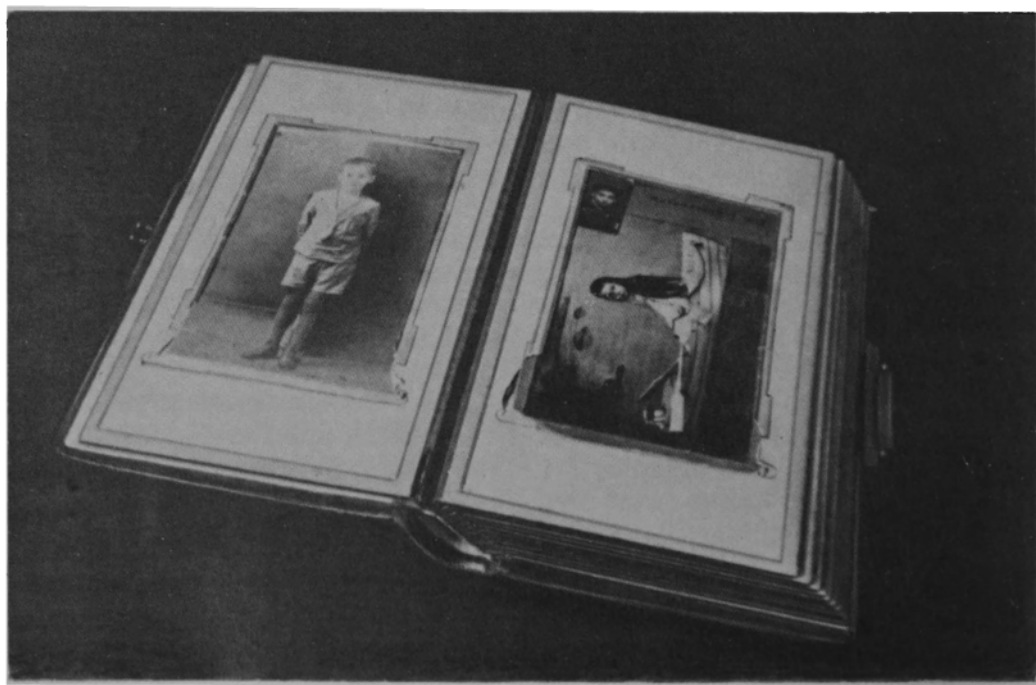
"My mother's father graduated from an artillery school." (Ira showed us a drawing made by her grandfather: a beautifully done Easter card of a floral design, with the words: "Happy Easter! Love to you, my wife and daughters."—A.A., D.G.) "During the Civil War he was an

officer in the Red Army, deputy-in-charge of the artillery base for the Western Front. He, Mikhail Pankin," (she then showed us a photograph of an artillery officer with a moustache.—A.A., D.G.) "supplied ammunition to the *Aurora*. I found out from Yura that Grandfather had died of typhus in a town called Bui during the Civil War. Look, and this is my great-grandfather, also a military man, and here is his wife." (She showed us a photograph.—A.A., D.G.) "My mother and Aunt Tina went to grammar school. My mother later took a translators' course. Aunt Tina was born in St Petersburg in 1895."

There is still a slight hint of guilt in Ira's voice. What is behind it? Could it be the realisation that here she is, alive, and Yura is dead? That she was saved and Yura was left behind to die?

We are back to the same question. How did the diary get to Vologda? We put this question as much to ourselves as to Ira. It is a most painful one to her. In it lie the main reasons for Ira's tenseness and unhappiness. This question has tortured her from the day she learnt of the diary, i.e. when the extract from it was published in *Smena*. She read it, rushed down to the *Smena* office, and asked for the diary. It was then she discovered that the Trifonov family had had it in Vologda. From that moment on she has been tormented by the mystery of the diary. Suppose Yura himself had brought it to Vologda? What then?

She suddenly switches the subject and starts telling us about her aunt.



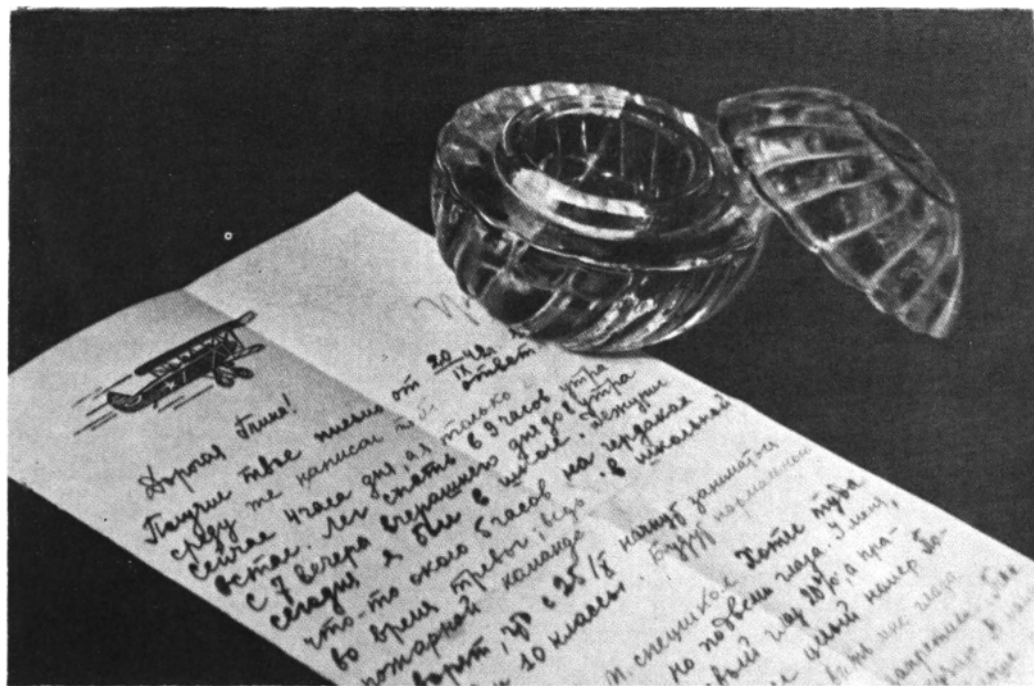
The Ryabinkin's family album.

She shows us the family chronicle kept by Aunt Tina—she has written down everything she remembered about her relatives, about herself and her ancestors for the family archives:

“I was working in a town called Vyazma during a typhus epidemic. Returned to Leningrad in 1921 to resume my studies at college. Graduated in 1923. Then started working in Leningrad, and later was transferred to the hospital named after Dr. Morozov, popularly called Morozovka, out of town, on Lake Ladoga. Worked as a general practitioner, then as acting head doctor. When the war began I was sent to a hospital for evacuated people, where I worked up to 1945. My duties took me to Byelorussia and East Prussia. I was awarded decorations and a medal.”

We seem to have diverged but we are all thinking of the same thing—those January days...

“Yura had poor sight. Mother knew about it, but she did not realise just how bad it was. He concealed the fact. He used to read a lot. We subscribed to many magazines. We had all the issues of a magazine called *Round the World*, and lots of adventure stories. His boyfriends used to play in our corridor. There was an enormous cupboard out there, with a screen next to it, where they kept knights' visors, sticks and all sorts of things. I still wonder how they managed never to injure themselves. I remember Yura used to write stories. The teacher at school would often complain about his behaviour in maths lessons. Mother would say in reply: ‘Give him more work to do. What happens is that he's very quick at solving maths problems, so he is the first to finish them and feels bored afterwards...’ ”



Yura's ink-pot and his letter to Aunt Tina.

"What was this ration card, the one Yura often mentions in his diary? Is he talking about your card?"

"Probably. You see, we could obtain biscuits on a children's card, which grownups didn't get. At the time, I knew nothing about it—I only learned this from Yura's diary."

"Did you have anybody in the family who believed in God?"

"Of course not. Neither Mother nor Aunt Tina did. Especially as Mother was a member of the Communist Party. We used to have a beautiful icon hanging in the kitchen, most probably Grandmother's. Yura remembered Grandmother alive. He knew Grandfather, too. Maybe they took him to church on Sundays. The singing there was wonderful. Perhaps he asked Mother questions about religion. Mother joined the Party in 1927. Then she was expelled because of my father, after his arrest—that was in 1937."

"Had she been reinstated later?"

"I believe so. But I don't know for sure. Though most likely she was. Because when Mother died in Vologda, a militiaman took me on his lap, and I remember him writing something, some kind of a document, and then pinning to it a little red card."

"What do you remember about your father?"

"I remember one of his visits well. He used to come home from Karelia. He was transferred there in 1934, and in 1937 he was arrested. Following his arrest he was sent to Ufa, where he died during the war... We seem to have come in for everything. Our family was not bypassed by the horrors of war and other misfortunes. Right before the war Mother had a job at the Palace of Labour. She was in charge of the book stocks there. It had something to do with building up libraries. I didn't know much about such things then. My mother was good at languages, was fluent in French and quite good at German and Polish. She was a highly intellectual person. When I read in Yura's diary that Mother used to beat him I couldn't understand it at all. Our parents never laid a finger on us. The only explanation I can find is that at Yura's age all perceptions are heightened and exaggerated... The way I knew Mother, she couldn't possibly have done it..." Suddenly she said: "They took him away by plane somewhere... For some reason I have this idea."

Then she looked at us apprehensively. We said nothing. Then she added:

"This thought keeps nagging at me. Subconsciously... Suppose he's still alive? Strange, isn't it?"

We were all attention. Then she continued with animation:

"If he was taken out of Leningrad he would have survived—with his love of life, if he'd felt he had the slightest chance he would have survived. Suppose he did? But then he'd have... After all, he knew all the addresses, he'd have tried to find us... He'd have been looking at least for me... On the other hand, with his youthful, categorical attitudes... To go through all that! He saw it differently—as a betrayal... The fact that he was left behind. But I can't be... How can I answer for it? I was only a child then... But sometimes I think—suppose suddenly... Maybe he thinks: if I didn't appear then why turn up at all?"

Now we understood the main thing that tortured her ever since she learned about the discovery of Yura's diary not far from Vologda. How did it end up in Vologda? Some years ago she went there, but all her enquiries were to no avail. She could not trace her brother or any vestige of him. But she was still not convinced. The almost impossible hope is still there, and evidently it gives her no peace. A faint sense of guilt for what happened to Yura, a feeling that can only live on in a highly conscientious person, makes her cling to her hope—just suppose ... and if so...?

We could not help Ira; we could neither encourage her hopes, nor could we destroy them. We tried to think of ways in which the diary would have turned up in Vologda: perhaps a social service squad found Yura in the flat and took charge of him—they used to visit flats at that time. Then they took him to a hospital and he died there, and either a nurse or a doctor, or a fellow patient had his diary and was evacuated soon afterwards, taking it with him or her... Anybody could have got hold of the diary: the person who buried him, or somebody to whom Yura himself had passed it just before he died. A lot of people from Leningrad were evacuated to the Vologda region. Or maybe the I. family took Yura down to the boiler room, where it was much warmer? That was what Ira's old neighbour insisted had happened. Perhaps it was in that boiler room that Yura's diary had been charred. Was it there that Yura kept writing: "I am hungry ... hungry ... hungry" (in the second diary, the one that was lost)? But what happened next we do not know.

Neither of these versions seem to give grounds for hope that Yura survived. His sister, however, has not lost hope. She keeps on hoping, is loath to give up hope, and none of our logical explanations have made any difference. We felt sorry for her, and suffered with her, grieved with her, shared her pride, and also wanted a miracle to happen. Through this woman's story we saw the Ryabinkin family, which used to be large, and the Pankin family, closely connected to it. They were families of true St Petersburg stock, the Russian intelligentsia who became Leningraders—but not without some difficulties. Ira enabled us to see something of Yura Ryabinkin from outside, rather than through the diary, and that was of great importance to us. Through her we came to understand the workings of Yura's conscience, to see the sources of his moral development.

Yura Ryabinkin's steadfastness sometimes seems its opposite: hunger is gradually eroding his inner strength. But the strength is renewed. With increasing self-exactingness he regains his concern, his love, his shame and his kindness. He suffers from hunger, cold weather, lice, but at the same time from shame, too. He is overwhelmed by his love for his dear ones, by his hatred for the enemy, he dreams of a better future, of victory. Like an animal, he follows his instincts, is ready to gnaw wood or leather belts. As a man, he clings to books, to his family, to culture, beauty, to ideas which cannot be fitted in with what is actually happening. These contradictions reach the very depths of his soul, never before touched by harsh reality. The instinct for self-preservation cannot destroy the human being within him. When hunger and fear grow out of all

proportion, the barriers fall, but then in desperation and stubbornness he succeeds in restoring them.

Thanks to Ira we learnt a lot about Yura, but we still did not know how he died or how the diary survived. We began to be carried away by Ira's secret but firm belief. Not that we started believing that Yura was among the living, but somehow he had stopped being dead with such finality.

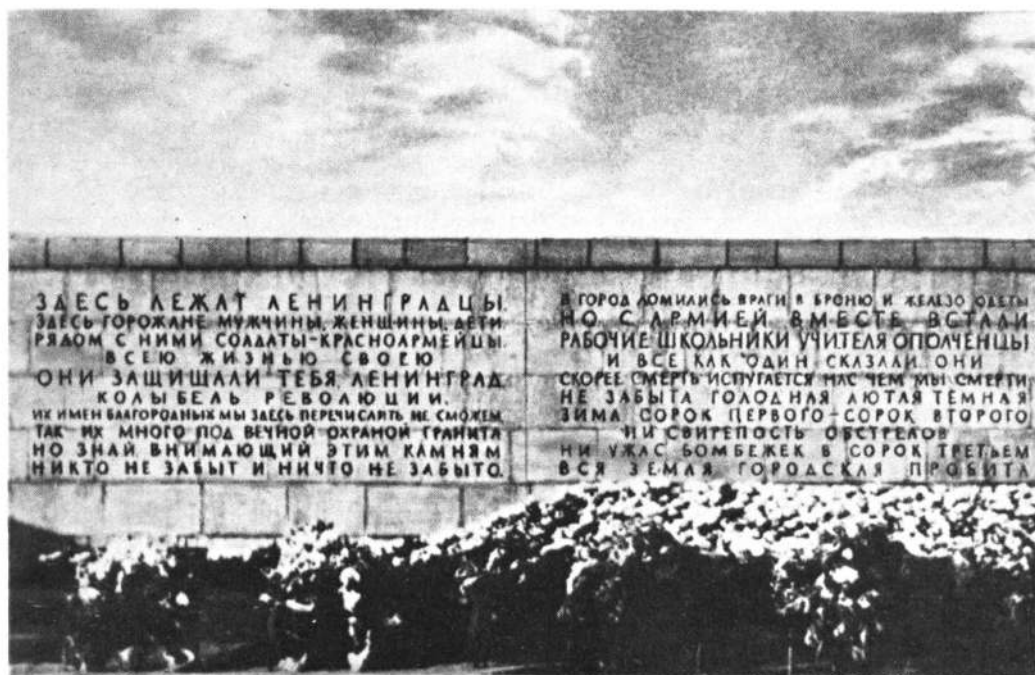
We had wanted to discover the circumstances of his death. What we did find out was something else—Ira's cherished belief that Yura is still alive. Her faint hope did not convince us but somehow we could not think of Yura as a dead person. It was her feeling of guilt—here I am alive and he is dead—that created this improbable hope. While there is this feeling of guilt a person cannot be completely dead in the conventional understanding of the concept to which we are accustomed.

"True, the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing. There are no more rewards for them; they are utterly forgotten. For them love, hate, ambition, all are now over. Never again will they have any part in what is done here under the sun." The Bible is merciless, it leaves no room for consolation. Its words, strangely enough, seem to take from you all hope of the soul's immortality. But is its severity so incontrovertible? Yura Ryabinkin has his part, his share in what is going on under the sun today. Certainly a part of him lives on in the thoughts, feelings and love of some people (no matter how few). He still disturbs his sister's emotions and conscience: "Here am I, still alive, while he..." Something has also remained with those of us who have read Yura's diary. We too are left with an agonisingly guilty feeling. Wherein lies our fault? And the eight-year-old Ira, what did she do wrong? Yet she is still living with a feeling of guilt.

When we decided to include Yura's diary in the second part of this Book of the Leningrad Blockade, we wanted to create a kind of memorial to a Leningrad boy, one of the many thousands living in the city at that time. It seemed to us a noble and just aspiration. Suddenly the question arose: we create a memorial—and then what? We erect it and feel free? Or put it up in order to feel free? But no matter what we do we cannot accomplish our goal. Yura came into our lives for good.

How many of them are there among us! Those whose presence we are still aware of, or whose absence still tortures us. We do not need memorials, including literary ones, to secure release, but to link ourselves to these people forever.

There is now a large museum in a township called Osinovka on the banks of Lake Ladoga. It is always full of people from Leningrad and from other towns and cities. The displays contain authentic things, including photographs, maps, portraits, pictures, models of ships, barges and piers, and tell, in concrete terms, how the sailors, and later the soldiers fighting for the Road of Life, supplied Leningrad, keeping the besieged city in contact with the rest of the country. In the museum's courtyard stand a one-and-a-half-ton lorry, a three-ton lorry and a bus. Nowadays they look touchingly small, old-fashioned and ineffectual. But these were the vehicles that carried over a half million women and



Part of the memorial wall at the Piskarevsky Cemetery.

"Here lie Leningraders—men, women and children. Beside them lie Red Army soldiers. They laid down their lives for you, Leningrad, the cradle of the Revolution.

We cannot here give the noble names of all these people, so many there are who have launched into eternity under the granite of the monument.

*Looking at these stones, remember:
no one has been forgotten, nothing has been forgotten."*

*"The vile enemy, clothed in armor and steel,
was trying to take the city by storm.*

*But the People's Volunteers—workers, students, teachers—stood up,
side by side with the soldiers,*

*and they said: it is more likely that we shall frighten death,
than that we lose heart when we have to face it.*

*That hungry, freezing cold, dismal winter of 1941-42,
the ruthless artillery fire and brutal bombings of 1943—all this has not been forgotten.
The soil of the city is scarred."*

children out of the city across the frozen lake. They brought food to the city. Looking at them now, you think what pitiful contraptions they are. But in their day they were powerful machines in the hands of those who were inspired by the idea of saving the city, the idea of victory. The museum preserves the memory of those who fought on the Road of Life—artillerymen, hydrographers, medical people, pilots, railwaymen. Their decorations and medals, their watches and guns are on display. Only a few of them are alive today. But the museum does not look like a memorial. It is more like a story with a large cast of characters taking part in it. The special feature of the exhibits is that they do not show the dead, those who have left life, but people in action—emaciated, with

prominent cheekbones, wearing field shirts with shoulder tabs...

On May 9, Victory Day, thousands of Leningraders go to the Piskarevsky Cemetery. Entire families and single people, old and young. The common graves are free of snow by this time, exposing last year's grass. People lay flowers on this dark dry grass, some lay sweets, cigarettes, bread—small pieces of it. Maybe Yura Ryabinkin is among those who lie in the common graves. And even if he is not, every one of those buried there needed that piece of bread.

Yura Ryabinkin passionately wanted to live. Sometimes it seems that his short, incomplete life seeks at least some kind of continuation. Even after his death there is a definite sense of unspent life force. He could not fully comprehend why he had to die so early, without, he thought, really proving himself in any way. But his diary lives on and through the diary comes a powerful yearning for life.

The blockaded city in which he lived, was a city of suffering, with empty plots where houses were ruined or burnt-out, a city of irreplaceable losses, of lives nipped in the bud. That city is not to be seen now. The wounds healed fast, leaving no scars. It returned to its normal life with vigorous energy, as if releasing power accumulated throughout those 900 days. There is nothing of that time left, nothing at all, as if the waters had closed over wartime Leningrad. Many years later people began wondering what had happened and where. A sign was restored on Nevsky Prospekt: "This side of the street is dangerous during artillery bombardment."

The line of defence was marked with monuments, a Green Belt of Glory was planted. New residential areas are moving further and further beyond the line of defence. The same thing has happened to memories of the blockade—these are deep inside, like the age rings in a tree trunk.

What makes the city so beautiful? Is it an old mansion on Vasilievsky Island, the *Aurora* at its permanent mooring, or the "white nights"? For the new generation the blockade has somehow become part of that beauty, given the city's image a tragic power.

We are finishing our long work with a strange feeling, with the same importunate question ringing in our ears: why, for what purpose, have we brought back to life people who long ago left this world, why have we exposed all their long-past pain and suffering? We found many an answer to this question, though we could not find one all-embracing answer. But we have become convinced that what we did had to be done. All this is part of our past, and the living have to know it.



ГРАЖДАНЕ!
И АРТОБСТРЕЛЕ
ТА СТОРОНА УЛИЦЫ
АБ ОЛЕЕ ОПАСНА.



The book shows that Leningraders—factory workers, scientists, actors, Party functionaries, children and old people were not crushed by the sufferings that came their way. As we read the book, we find Leningraders speaking and thinking of everyday matters to do with survival—and with the war. Even small children knew better than to talk of food. And still these starving people worked and did their stint for victory, even when their hands literally froze to the metal tools...

The authors' comments are as sincere and moving as the survivors' tales.

This is a book about genuine tragedy, but it is also about dignity, generosity of heart and strength of spirit.



"Extensive documentary material exists about the Leningrad blockade, the heroic defenders of the Neva stronghold, and that 'mercenary' of the fascists—blockade starvation... A host of feature articles, stories and novels have been written.

"We wanted to supplement the story of the Leningrad blockade with the testimony of ordinary people about how they lived, to record the voices of participants, their stories about themselves, their families and their comrades. The voices of the ordinary Leningraders, working or not working, married or unmarried, foremen, workers, children, qualified engineers, nurses—but it's not a matter of trades and occupations. We were interested in what people had gone through. We wanted to take in, to understand and preserve all that people had experienced, what they had felt, what had gone on in their hearts, and we did not want to speak of people in general but of specific people with names and addresses, the old and the young, the strong and the weak, those who had been saved and those who had saved others... In those conditions, it turned out, a person's daily round and his very life merged into one: a bucket of water, a wick lamp, and a bread queue—all required incredible effort, and everything was a problem for the weak and exhausted.

"We also were confronted with no less agonising problems of a moral character..."

A. Adamovich, D. Granin

